

10 Best Dive Travel Values, P. 53

SCUBA DIVING

THE MAGAZINE DIVERS TRUST

Great White Way

The World's
Top Spots
for In-Your-Face
Shark Action

Tested:
11 New Dive
Computers
Find Your Perfect Match

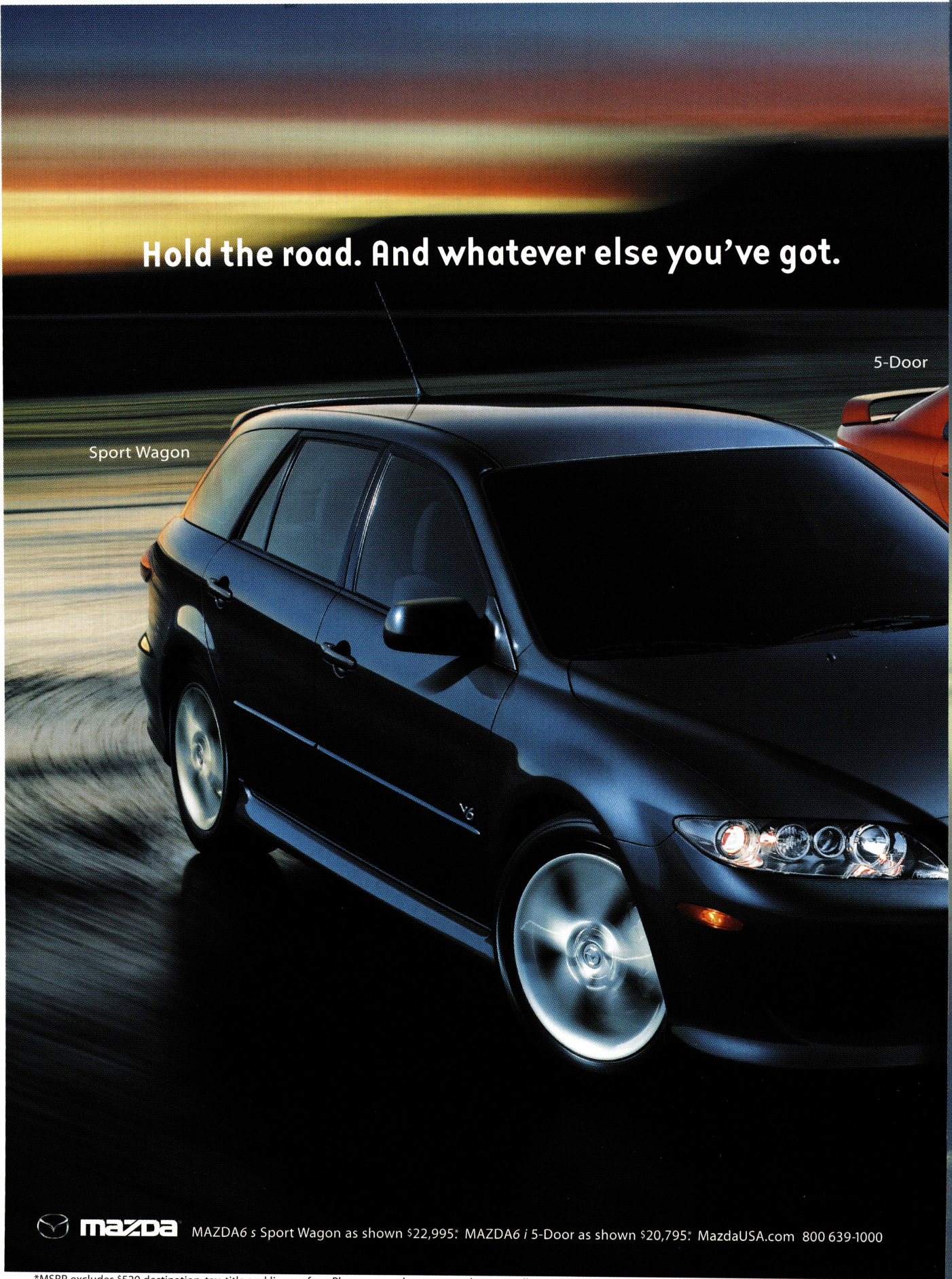
Size Matters
Tips for Getting
Gear That Fits

Can I Ever
Dive Again?
Dive Medicine
Update

AUGUST 2004

PUBLICATION MAIL AGREEMENT #40063752

SWIMMING WITH
THE BIG BOYS:
Get this close only
in South Africa,
Australia and Mexico.

A black and white photograph of a Mazda6 driving on a road at sunset. The car is a dark color, possibly black or dark blue, and is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The background features a bright, low sun on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the sky with warm colors. The road surface is visible, and the car's wheels are in motion. The overall mood is dynamic and adventurous.

Hold the road. And whatever else you've got.

Sport Wagon

5-Door



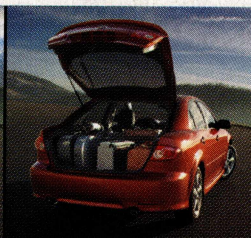
mazda

MAZDA6 s Sport Wagon as shown \$22,995* MAZDA6 i 5-Door as shown \$20,795* MazdaUSA.com 800 639-1000

*MSRP excludes \$520 destination, tax, title and license fees. Please remember to properly secure all cargo. ©2004 Mazda North American Operations

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zoom-zoom



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**WOMENS
SIZES**
4-14

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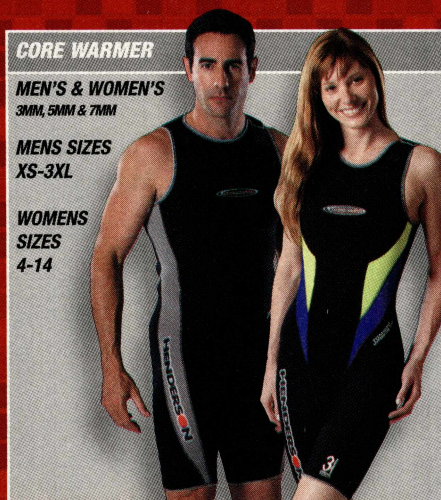


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4-14



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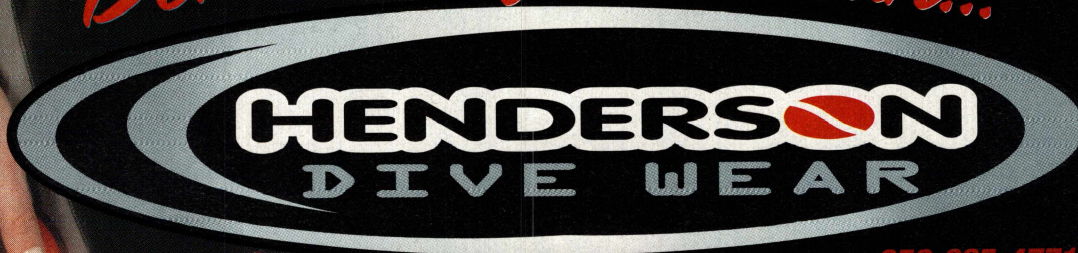
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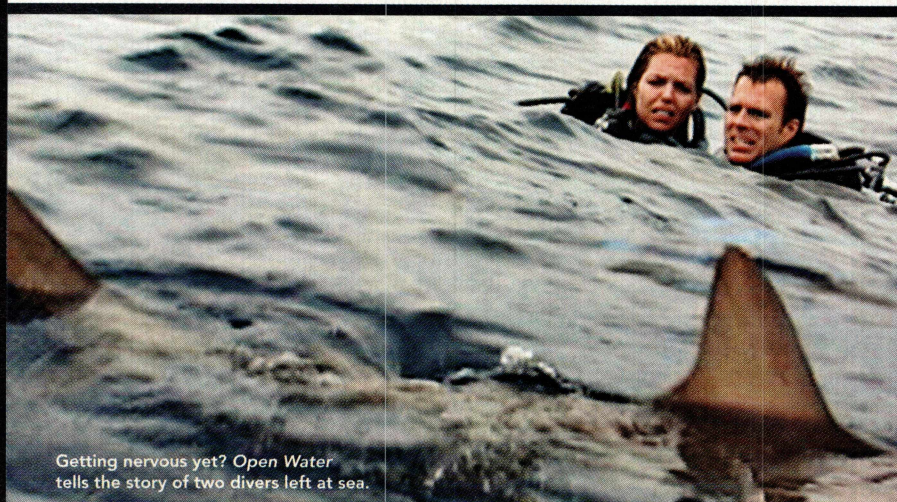
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T A L K



Getting nervous yet? *Open Water* tells the story of two divers left at sea.

(EDITOR'S NOTE)

Blair Fish Project

Don't let a summer thriller keep you from doing what you love.

BY BUCK BUTLER

SINCE DEBUTING at this year's Sundance Film Festival, the horror film *Open Water*, which is scheduled for wide release this month, has won acclaim from critics who have likened it to "*Jaws* meets *The Blair Witch Project*." The indie movie, which was made for under \$500,000 and filmed primarily in the Bahamas, chronicles the plight of two divers stranded at sea by a dive boat. The psychological terror visited on the drifting divers is ratcheted up several notches by the presence of circling sharks.

I haven't seen the movie yet, so that's pretty much all I know about it: It's scary and it's about divers. Those two widely known facts have been sufficient to send a ripple of anxiety through the diving community, with some worrying that *Open Water* may do for boat diving what *Jaws* did for nighttime ocean swimming and *Blair Witch* did for hiking in haunted forests in Maryland. Like *Blair Witch*,

this movie is said to use low-budget realism to effect high-adrenaline terror, and the fears it plays on are fundamental to the human experience: abandonment, isolation and the unknown. But the effect, I'm sure, is also cinematic—an exaggerated threat and a compressed plot designed to keep you on the edge of your seat. In other words, it's just a movie.

Whether *Open Water* ultimately scares prospective divers from becoming certified divers is yet to be seen. But the movie shouldn't keep active divers from participating in the sport they love. Dive accident statistics, experience and common sense tell us that, considering the number of boat dives made every year, the incidence of divers stranded by boats is infinitesimal. But if your common sense is having trouble prevailing over your instinctive fear, remember there are steps you can take to ensure you make it back to shore safely:

> ASK QUESTIONS. Your dive operator should have established procedures for counting heads at the end of every dive and for calling divers back to the boat in case of an emergency. The crew should

be able to explain these procedures clearly and shouldn't mind you asking about them. If you don't feel comfortable with their procedures or their explanations, don't dive with them.

> LISTEN TO THE DIVE BRIEFING. The crew will spell out everything you need to make your way back onto the boat at the end of the dive, including site geography, currents, conditions and exit procedures.

> LEARN UNDERWATER NAVIGATION. Study and practice natural navigation and compass navigation to make sure you surface at the boat.

> DIVE WITH TWO SURFACE-SIGNALING DEVICES. Carry both a visual and an audible signal, such as a bright-orange inflatable safety sausage and an air-powered horn. As backups, whistles and signaling mirrors work, too.

If you decide to see *Open Water*, experience it as it was meant to be experienced—let your heart race and your teeth chatter. Then remember that it's just a movie, and get out there and dive.

(ONLINE)

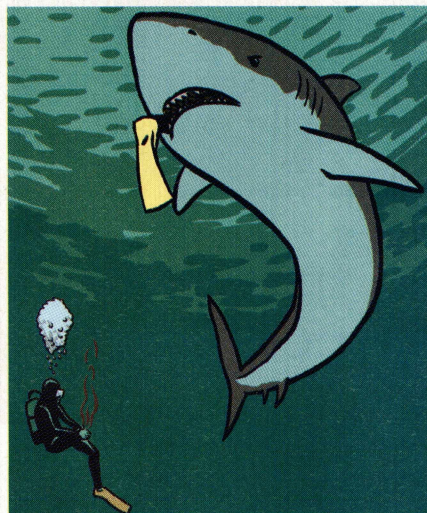
Photo Pro or Average Joe

Can you tell the difference between a professional underwater photographer's shot and one taken by an amateur? It's not always as easy as you think. Go to ScubaDiving.com and click on "Photography" to take the Photo Pro or Average Joe Challenge brought to you by Solmar V. We'll feature new pairs of images every few weeks.

(LETTERS)

Does Not Taste Like Chicken

GORDON BASS'S worst-case-scenario feature ("Now What?!" June 2004) was as entertaining as it was informative. I never considered the possibility that I could lose a leg to a shark during a dive, but it's good to know that "the unexpected tang of human flesh mixed with neoprene is off-putting to all but the hungriest sharks." If I'm going to lose a leg, I'll take comfort in the knowledge that the shark probably didn't enjoy the meal. —Carson Tramell, San Antonio, Texas



Thanks for the Memories

THANKS FOR THE DIVE LOG article on the U.S. Virgin Islands (June 2004). Back in 1991, this newly certified diver spent a fantastic week on St. John diving, snorkeling, hiking and "limin'" the days away. After more than a decade of diving around the world, I still can't recall any dives I enjoyed more than sites like Carval Rock and Congo Cay. Thanks for the trip down memory lane! It's good to know paradise hasn't changed. —Bill Lawson, Memphis, Tenn.

(HOW TO REACH US)

We want to know what's on your mind. Here are three easy ways to tell us:

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FAX: (912) 351-0735

MAIL: Editor, Scuba Diving,
6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208,
Savannah, GA 31405

Love Hurts

I READ YOUR ARTICLE on dental issues with great interest. For years, my love of scuba was clouded by the jaw fatigue I felt after a busy day under water. And by the end of weeklong live-aboard trips, I would often be in serious agony. Finally, I said something to my dentist (a fellow diver it turns out!) and he recommended a custom mouthpiece. Problem solved—it works like a charm! I just wish I'd said something sooner. —John Cameron, Philadelphia, Pa.

(THE NUMBERS)

I'D RATHER DIVE WITH A NEWBIE

34%

Percentage of divers who say photographers make the worst dive buddies.

IT HOLDS AIR—WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT?

29%

Percentage of divers who say the tank is the piece of scuba gear most in need of innovation.

OVER HERE!

74%

Percentage of divers who say they carry a surface-signaling device, such as a safety sausage, whistle or signaling mirror.

TRAVELING LIGHT

30%

Percentage of divers who say they regularly rent gear when they travel to dive.

(Source: Surveys of users on www.scubadiving.com)

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NORTH



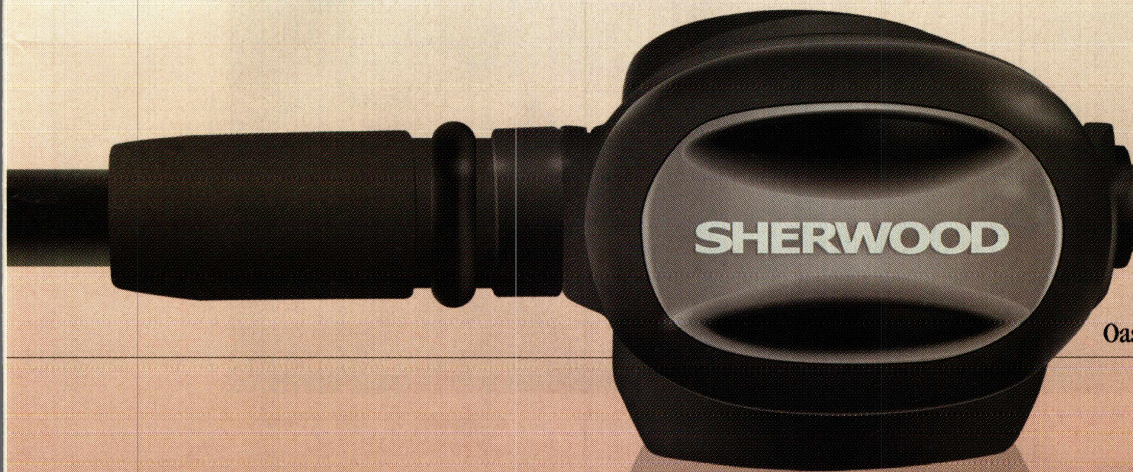
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SCUBA
DIVING

70

ScubaLab gets inside the brains of 11 new dive computers.



58 The Great White Way Separated by vast oceans, South Africa, South Australia and Guadalupe Island, Mexico, have one thing in common: Pulse-pounding white shark dives. *Text and Photography by Stephen Frink*

DIVE LOG

64 Hawaii On the water, in the water and below the water, this remote archipelago delivers breathtaking vistas and enough activities to make anyone say aloha. *Text and Photography by David Fleetham*

70 11 New Dive Computers

ScubaLab crunches the numbers on the screens and behind the scenes to find striking differences in both user-friendliness and how your bottom time is calculated. *By John Brumm*

LESSONS FOR LIFE

78 Too Deep, Too Soon Two novice divers find themselves out of their depth and outside their comfort zone on a guided quarry dive. One learns his lesson. One pays the price. *By Michael Ange*

Cover photo by Stephen Frink

SCUBA DIVING

GREAT DIVES

17 THIS MONTH'S must-dive sites include a soft-coral-draped skyscraper that rises from the depths off Fiji, a pier in Western Australia that shelters a surprising wealth of marine life, and an abandoned anchor awaiting discovery in the Turks & Caicos.

CURRENTS

22 TO THE GIANT Pacific octopus, sometimes the best defense is a good offense. Plus: An underwater MP3 player, the biggest artificial reef and the deepest pool in the world.

TRAVEL

34 BIG IN BELIZE Dive Gladden Spit during the annual whale shark migration, and you're in for the thrill of a lifetime.

41 DRIVE & DIVE The easygoing Mexican beach town of San Carlos is the gateway to unforgettable diving in the Sea of Cortez.

TRAINING

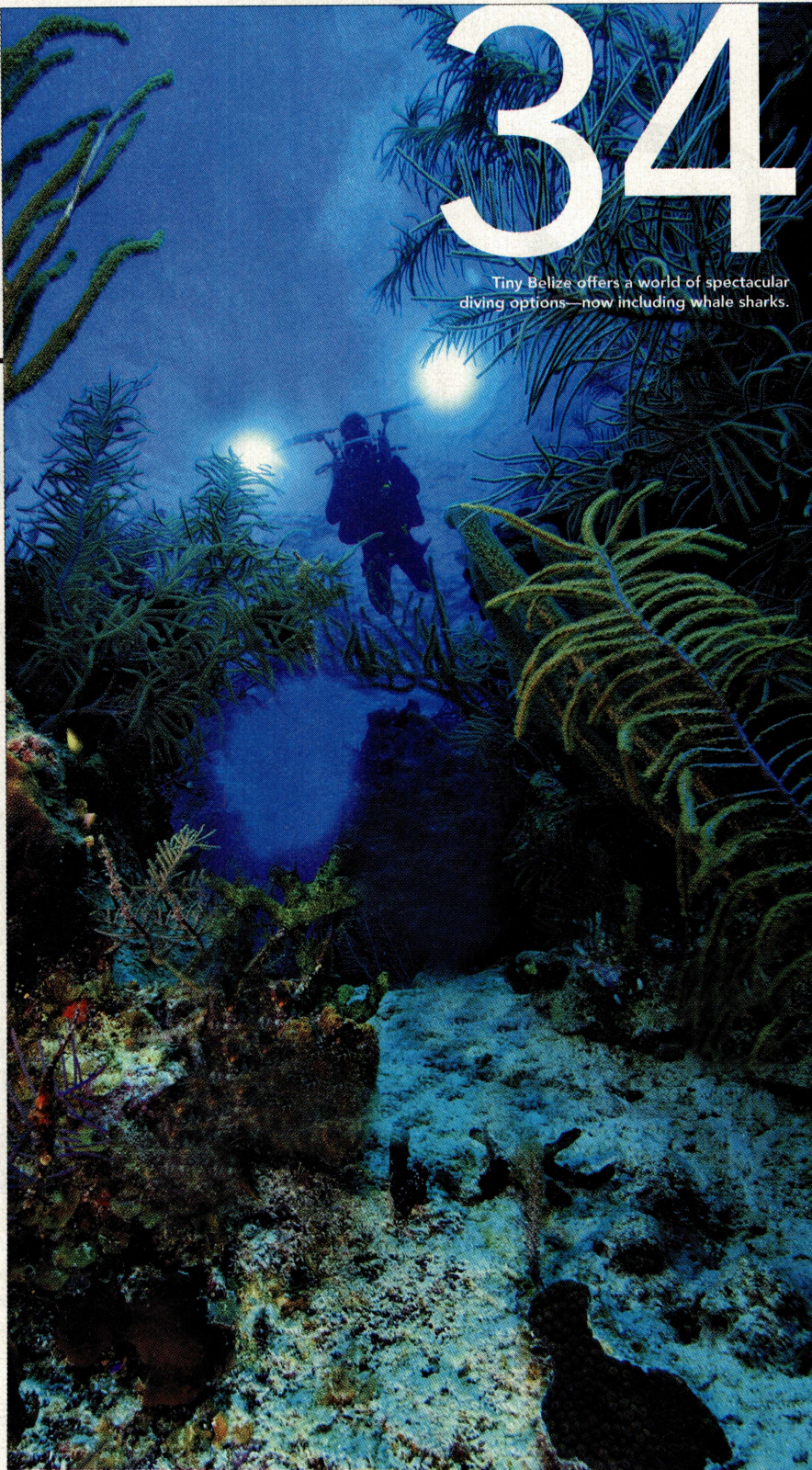
83 SIZE MATTERS You'll dive better and safer with properly fitting gear. We'll show how to get it.

89 YOUR BODY Find out if you can ever dive again, with the latest word on diving with diabetes, asthma, allergies and more.

94 PHOTOGRAPHY Learn the art and science of combining the topside and underwater scene in a single image.

34

Tiny Belize offers a world of spectacular diving options—now including whale sharks.



5 TALK 49 DIVE DEALS 96 IN DEPTH 104 LOOK

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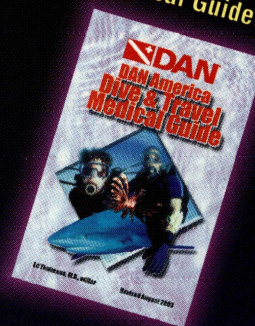
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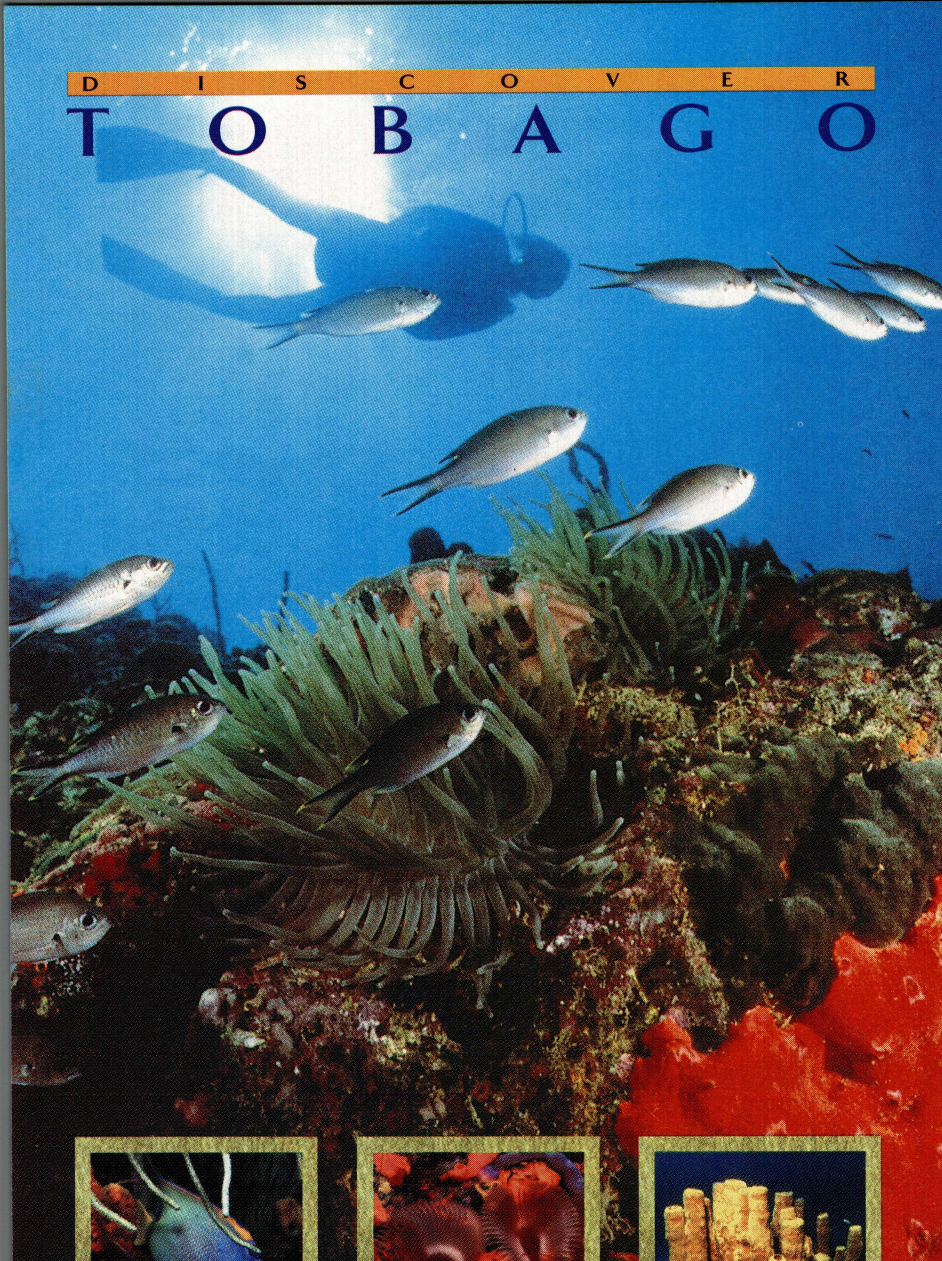


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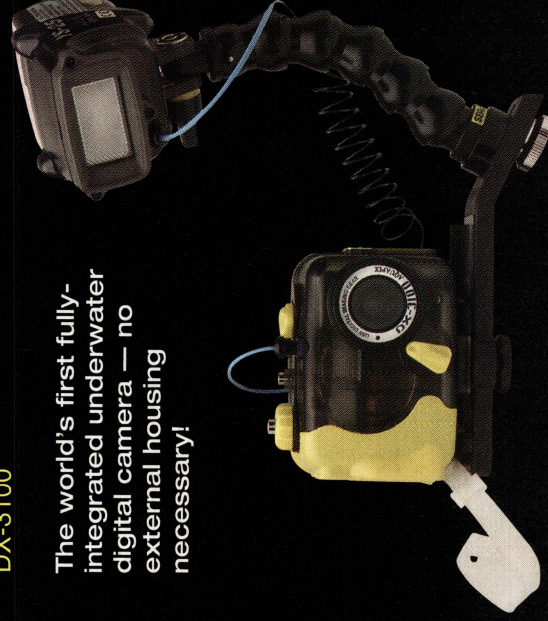
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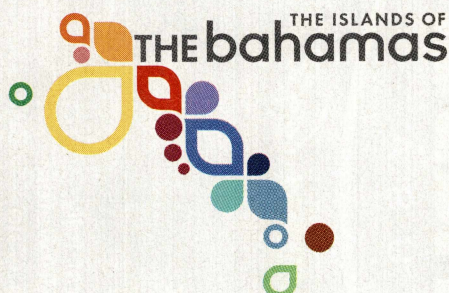
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Every year, we ask you to rate your dive experiences, and every year you give us your unvarnished opinions about the destinations you visit. We use these ratings to create our annual Readers' Choice Awards, the benchmark for excellence in diving. Your ratings will be published in the Top 100 list in our January 2005 issue and throughout the year in our Reader Ratings reports. We can't do any of it without feedback from divers like you. So fill it out, send it in and get ready to win.

Safe diving,

Buck Butler

Buck Butler, Editor



WIN THIS GEAR!

TELL US ABOUT THE Destination

Name of destination (please be specific, e.g., Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands)

Date of trip (month/year)

Please circle the number that represents your rating of the following:

(1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=very good, 5=excellent, NA=not applicable)

Marine life	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Visibility	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Health of marine environment	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Big animals (sharks, dolphins, rays, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Little animals (shrimp, anemones, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Wreck diving	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Wall diving	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Snorkeling	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Shore diving	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Diving for beginners	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Diving for advanced divers	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Underwater photography	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Value for your diving dollar	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Overall rating of the diving	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Overall rating of this destination	1	2	3	4	5	NA

Would you recommend this destination to a friend? YES NO

What was your favorite restaurant at this destination?

Favorite local dish? _____

Favorite bar or nightclub? _____

Favorite beer? _____

Favorite beach? _____

Best topside activity? _____

List your three favorite dive sites at this destination.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please tell us what you liked and didn't like about this destination:

TELL US ABOUT YOUR Favorites

Based on your personal dive experiences, name your favorite dive destination in the United States or Canada:

Based on your personal dive experiences, name your favorite dive destination outside of the United States and Canada:

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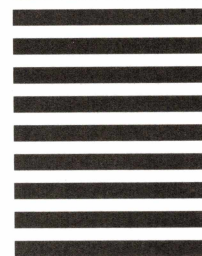
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Favorites

Name the three destinations you haven't visited that you'd **most like** to visit for diving: _____

Name your favorite bar or nightclub at any dive destination: _____

Name the dive destination with the best nightlife: _____

Name the dive destination with the best beaches: _____

Name the dive destination with the best local food: _____

Name the dive destination with the best topside activities: _____

Name the best dive destination to take a nondiving significant other: _____

Name the best dive destination to take kids: _____

Name your favorite dive resort at any destination: _____

Name your favorite dive operation at any destination: _____

FOLD HERE V

V FOLD HERE

TELL US ABOUT

Yourself

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

What is your age? _____

Number of dive vacations you take per year? _____

What is your diving skill level? (check one)

☐ Beginner ☐ Lower Intermediate

☐ Upper Intermediate ☐ Advanced

Do you own or rent most of your dive gear?

☐ own ☐ rent

Did you take underwater photographs during your last dive trip?

☐ yes ☐ no

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After being set adrift by the mutineers aboard the *Bounty* in 1789, Captain William Bligh passed near this seamount, which was later named in his honor.

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Mount Mutiny

THE INCREDIBLE HIGH-RISE seamount known as Mount Mutiny pierces the vast depths of the Bligh Waters area between the islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, rising more than 1,000 feet to nearly touch the water's surface. Only 200 yards in diameter at its peak, the seamount's sides fall sheerly into the abyss, creating a circular wall dive with nearly endless variety. One of the site's most impressive features is its south wall, where *Siphonogorgia* soft corals explode with color like fireworks in a night sky.

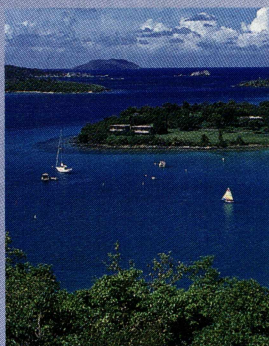


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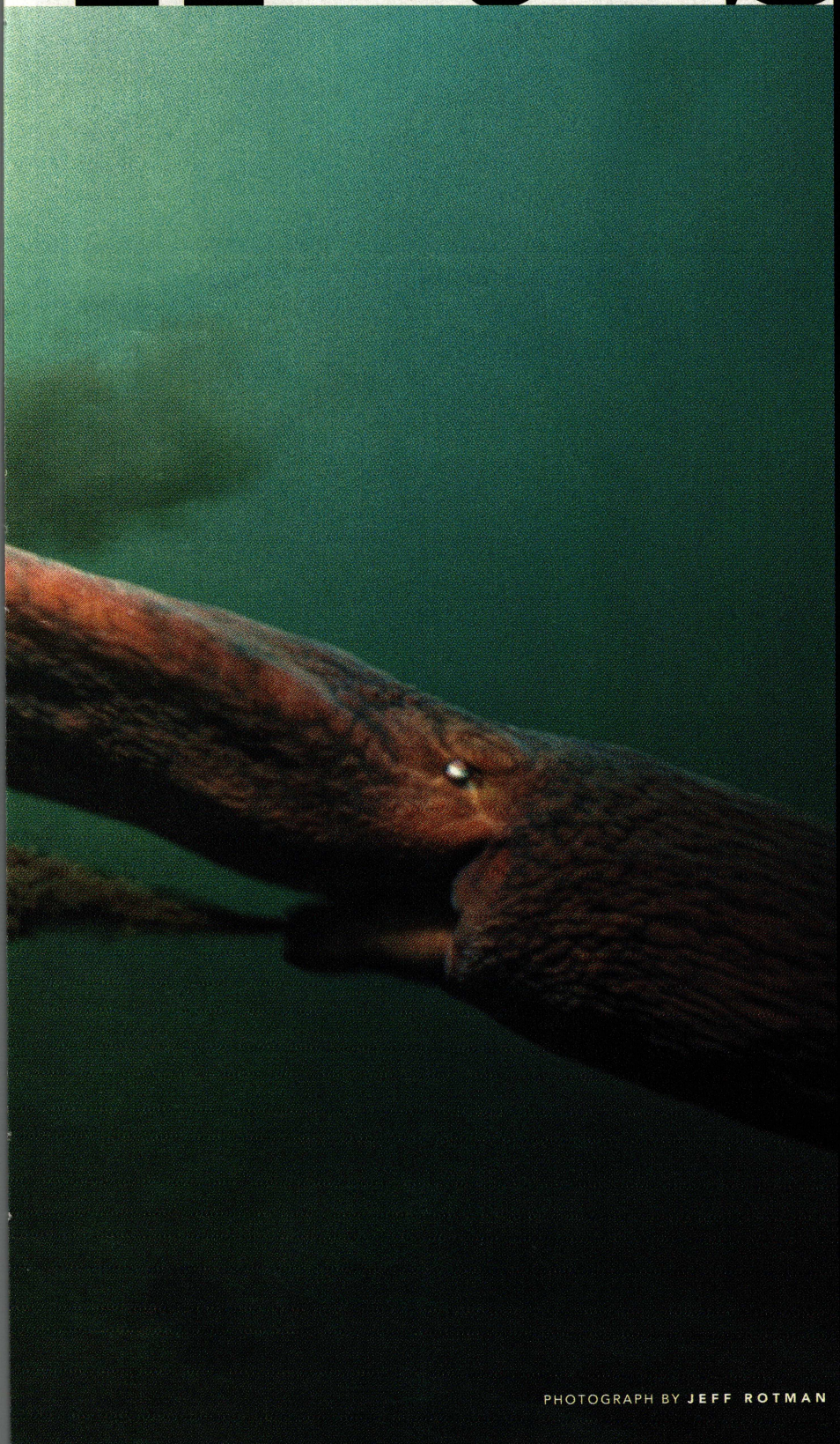
Curre



An adult giant Pacific octopus off Race Rocks, British Columbia, inks marine zoologist Jim Cosgrove.



n t s



(BEHAVIOR)

Ink'd!

Get too close to the giant Pacific octopus, and you might come out like a human Rorschach test.

When stalked by a predator, the giant Pacific octopus employs an arsenal of evasive tactics to avoid being eaten. A 60-pound, eight-armed octopus can squeeze through openings as narrow as three inches and stuff itself into impossibly cramped hiding places. It can change its skin color and texture in a flash to match its surroundings. If it's near the sea bottom, an octopus can turn its suckers downward and cling to the substrate, then stop breathing to hide its white body parts, making it nearly invisible.

When forced into open water, as a last resort a threatened octopus can squirt a cloud of ink and then jet-propel backward, disappearing into the murk. "It's a military tactic originated in nature," says photographer Jeff Rotman. "Just after I took this shot, the octopus shot backward about six feet and then I couldn't see it."

Off the coast of Victoria, British Columbia, near Race Rocks, Rotman was photographing marine biologist Jim Cosgrove of the Royal British Columbia Museum. This particular octopus, perhaps afraid that it was about to become a predator's cephalopod du jour, spurted its ink toward Cosgrove's face. Both men were momentarily enveloped in darkness, while the octopus threw itself into reverse, out of harm's way.

Cosgrove has a deep respect for these intelligent and tenaciously strong animals. After more than 30 years of studying the behavior of *Octopus dofleini*, Cosgrove knows when one is about to hide, fight or flee. Still, he's been caught off-guard and attacked a couple of times. "They are dangerous and incredibly powerful," he says. "And they're very good at what they do."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF ROTMAN

(TOPSIDE)

CAYMAN JOYRIDE

Rising above it all.

Dangling from a nylon parachute hundreds of feet above the Caribbean Sea, a parasailor gets a lofty view of Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach. For about 50 bucks, you get 15 minutes of curl-your-toes post-dive fun. Operators—there are about 10 water-sports facilities offering parasailing—launch customers from small powerboats off Grand Cayman's East End and North Sound, where prevailing winds get parasailors airborne in a hurry.

(ILLEGAL ACTIVITY)

Rio Grande Slam

Before two illegal immigrants from Mexico recently turned up in El Paso, Texas, dressed in wetsuits, tanks and masks, Doug Mosier, spokesman for the local border patrol, thought he'd seen everything.

The men, whom Mosier says were likely narcotics smugglers, swam in 15 feet of water through a 100-yard-long drainage tunnel. They exited at a pumping station in El Paso, where they were apprehended along with a U.S. citizen, possibly a coyote.

"We've seen smugglers come up with numer-

ous ways to cross the border illegally," says Mosier. "Some guys have dressed up as clergy to avoid detection. We've seen others who came across walking backwards, to create misleading footprints. One guy even attached cow hooves to his shoes to cover his tracks. Of course," he adds, "a two-legged cow is a real giveaway."

But this latest episode—the first documented case in which border-crossing smugglers used scuba gear—astounded even Mosier, who's got 16 years on the job. "I would put this one in the all-time top 10, in terms of sheer ingenuity," he says.

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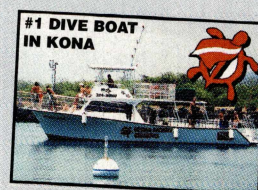
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(ARTIFICIAL REEF)

Warhorse to Pensacola

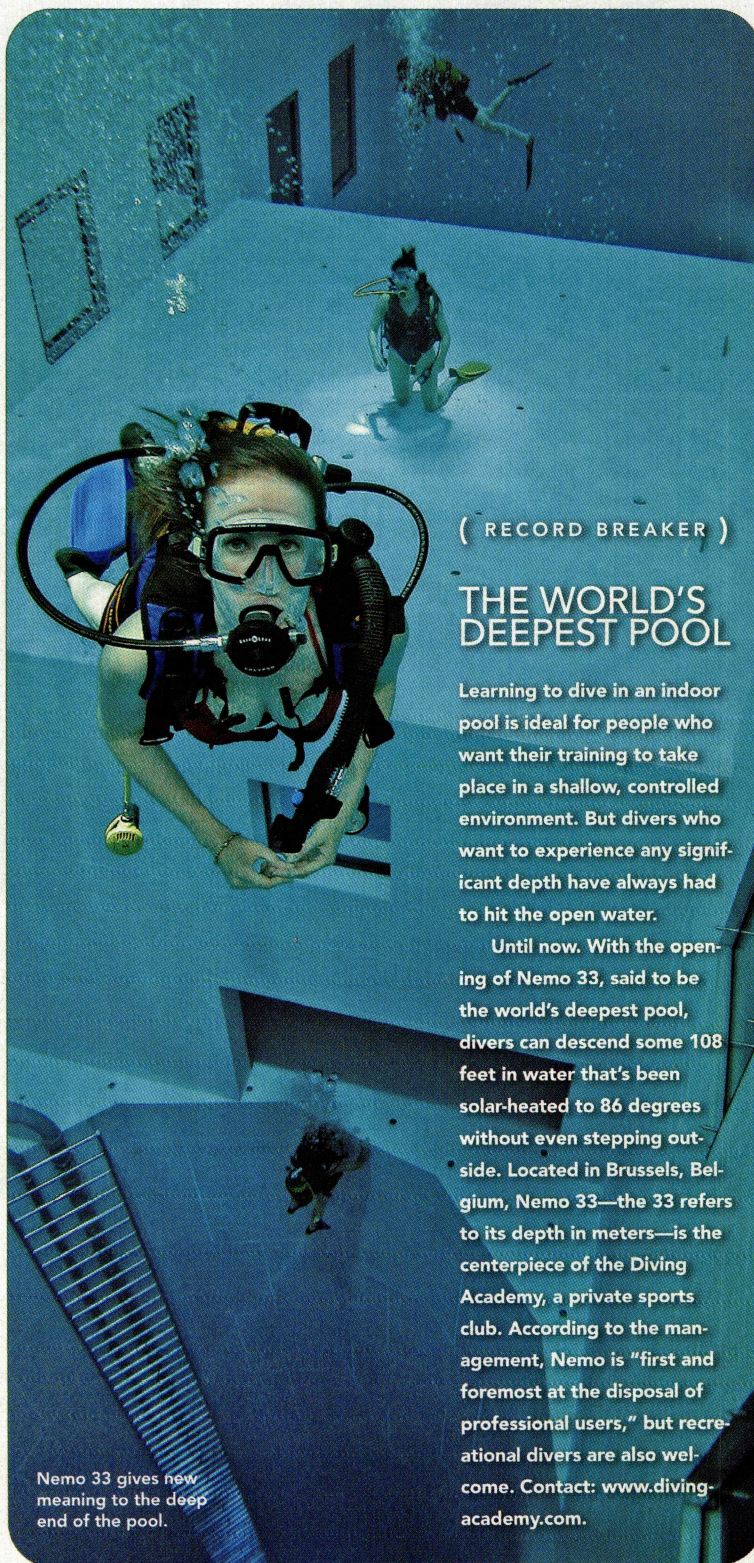
A monster aircraft carrier will become the biggest manmade reef.

When the aircraft carrier *USS Oriskany*—all 888 feet of it—is scuttled 25 miles off Pensacola, Fla., later this year, it will reportedly be the largest ship ever intentionally sunk to create an artificial reef.

Pensacola lobbied strenuously to get this giant in its backyard, and now that the Navy has finally given the green light, plans are underway to sink the ship in 50 to 250 feet of water, making this a world-class destination accessible to divers of all skill levels.

In its prime, the *Oriskany* played front-line roles in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and suffered the losses of many crewmembers in the process. It also saw dozens of its pilots disappear, most famously Sen. John McCain, who after taking off from the ship was shot down and held for five years as a POW in North Vietnam.

As a result, the upcoming sinking is a particularly symbolic occasion for those who once served onboard. Says Pensacola area resident Robert Price, who did a tour of duty on the ship in 1966, when a catastrophic fire killed 44 people: "As a diver, I'm thrilled the *Oriskany* will become a world-class diving platform and rejuvenate sea life in the area. But I'm also happy to see that it will become a kind of permanent memorial. I expect a lot of ashes will be spread over these waters."



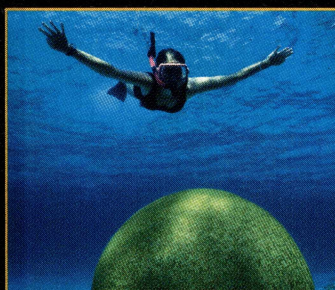
(RECORD BREAKER)

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Nemo 33 gives new meaning to the deep end of the pool.

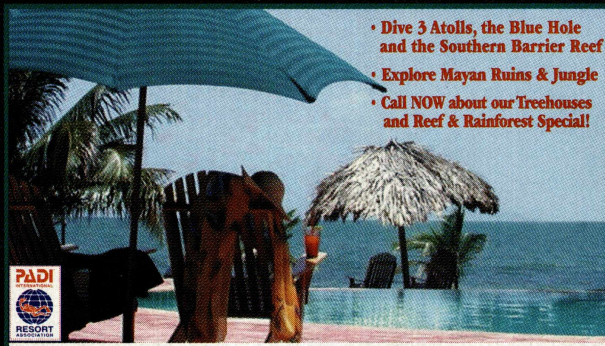


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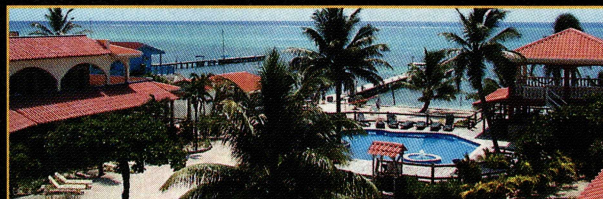
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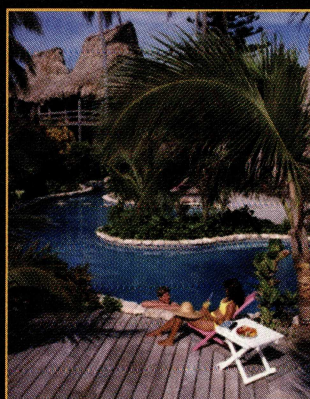
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(GADGET)

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The iRiver runs through it: Get down with the new H2O Audio system.

(QUOTE)

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(STAT)

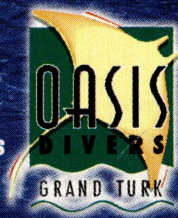
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most telling, boast elongated first dorsal fin spines that can be firmly engaged in an upright position with the aid of an adjacent spine.

When distinguishing between the families, tails tell the tale. The tail fins of triggerfishes, family *Balistidae*, have an arching or lunate shape, whereas the tails of filefishes, family *Monacanthidae*, tend to trail behind like the business end of a broom.

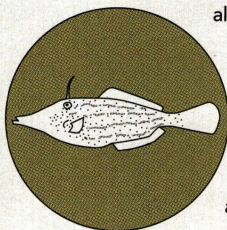
The common name leatherjackets comes from the fishes' extremely tough, rasp-like skin. Triggerfishes acquire their name from the trigger-

spine mechanism that locks the animals' bodies securely in place when they dive into tight crevices to escape predators.

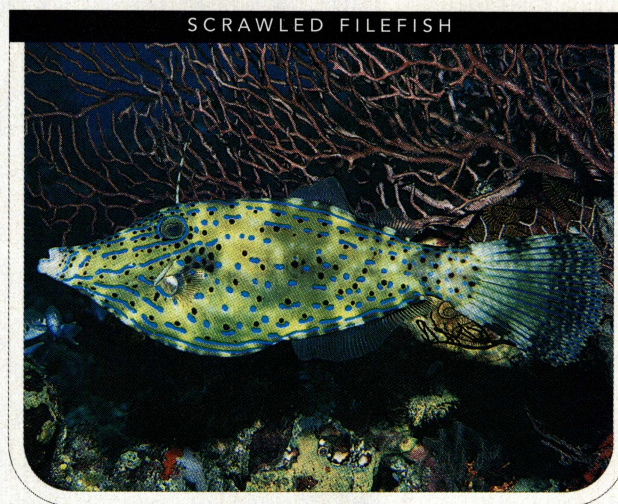
The dining habits of the two families are significantly different. Triggerfishes typically have small but powerful jaws

equipped with sharp teeth, allowing them to consume hard-shelled prey such as sea urchins, which queen triggerfishes agilely splinter and wolf down,

spines, shell and all. Filefishes show a broader diversity in their diets. The eclectic tastes of the scrawled filefish, for example, run from hydroids



SCRAWLED FILEFISH



to seagrasses. But most surprising, their favorite food is fire coral—a hydrocoral armored with a virtually impenetrable

exoskeleton and fortified with a potent battery of stinging capsules. —PAUL HUMANN AND NED DELOACH

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Travel



Dive Belize's Gladden Spit during the annual whale shark migration, and you're in for the thrill of a lifetime. **BY PAUL KVINTA**

DIVE TRAVEL GUIDE

Behemoths of Belize

"WE'RE going to need a bigger boat," mumbles a fellow diver, quoting Chief Brody from *Jaws* and staring dumbly at the shark that has just surfaced off our starboard side, the one masquerading as a submarine. The creature is damn near the length of Hank Rhamdas's 28-foot dive boat. "Ladies



Full moon fever:
Big-time whale shark
sightings, like the 25-foot
juvenile pictured here,
are thought to coincide
with lunar phases.

and gentlemen,” Rhamdas announces, proud as a peacock flounder, “I present your whale shark. I told you this was a guaranteed dive.” We’re bobbing in the open Caribbean, just outside a prominent jut in the southern Belize Barrier Reef called Gladden Spit, and before any of us can reconsider our stated desire to dive with an allegedly harmless but seriously big fish, Rhamdas orders the five of us to roll backward off the boat.

We’ve been well drilled on what to do next: descend 60 feet, stick close to our divemaster, Bertrand Garbutt, and if a whale shark appears, remain in tight formation. The shark will likely mistake our critical mass of bubbles for snapper spawn and



Whale sharks often confuse divers' bubbles with a quick and easy meal.

swoop in for a caviar buffet. If it gets too close, that’s when things get tricky. “If you touch the whale shark, it’s a \$10,000 fine,” Rhamdas explained. “But the whale shark, he can touch you all he wants.” We are allowed, he says, to “gently push away” any whale shark attempting to get too cuddly, but exactly how that’s done with an animal the size of a stretch limo, I’m not certain.

I’m contemplating all this when Garbutt suddenly points toward the barely discernible reef 80 feet below. A big, dark something rises slowly through the water column, and we soon see telltale white spots across its back. It’s a 20-footer, this whale shark, and he carves a graceful arc before

aiming straight for us. I’m mesmerized. Five feet before my mask, the largest living thing I’ve ever almost smooched alters his trajectory and soars directly over us, exposing the intimate details of his snowy-white underside—his pelvic and anal fins, his claspers, his personal remora freeloading just inside his pectoral fin. With his cave-like mouth open wide, the shark plows through our bubbles, and I can only imagine how disappointing his air breakfast must be. Undeterred, he gulps his way to the surface, where a half-dozen snorkelers from our boat grant him a respectful berth.

We stare at the surface for a long time, transfixed by the silhouette of this great fish

lolling against the morning sun, bright rays emanating from him halo-like.

But the moment doesn’t last.

Out of nowhere, two boats come roaring up, and in seconds a group of splashing, groping snorkelers surround the whale shark.

“That’s not supposed to happen,” insists Julie Berry, shaking her head when told of the snorkel frenzy. “There are rules.” We’re sitting in Berry’s office in Placencia, a village at the tip of a spindly peninsula with the same name in southern Belize, and Berry, dive operations manager for the Turtle Inn, is explaining the science behind—and fragile nature of—arguably the greatest whale shark diving on the planet.

Snapper Mosh-Pit

THE BELIZE BARRIER REEF parallels this Central American country’s coastline for 180 miles, forming the longest reef system in the western hemisphere. Gladden Spit represents the reef’s most distant point from the coast (29 miles from Placencia), and Berry explains that each spring, for reasons proba-

SCOTT JOHNSON (LEFT & ABOVE)

had five in my viewfinder at one time."

Despite being the world's biggest fish, sometimes reaching 50 feet long, whale sharks are hard to find. Predictable gatherings occur in a few places at certain times of the year—Ningaloo Reef off Western Australia, Mexico's Baja Peninsula—but Gladden Spit is the only known spot where these toothless filter-feeders dine on fish spawn. In other locales, the sharks graze on widely dispersed zooplankton, which is why dive operators must employ spotter planes to find them. That's not necessary at Gladden, where the cubera spawning occurs in the same two-square-mile area every year, around the full moons of April, May and June. This highly predictable, user-friendly situation creates a domino effect—whale sharks come for snapper, divers come for whale sharks and, slowly, Placencia transitions from a traditional fishing economy to a tourist destination.

This community of 900 people is still wrestling with how to handle a unique resource that the world is clamoring to see. Local fishermen still want to cast lines at Gladden, as they always have. More dive operators want in on the action. A relatively new marine reserve continues to tweak rules regulating both activities, and researchers are exploring the biological impact of all of this. "Most divers and fishermen are staying within the rules," says Berry. "But we're still trying to figure this all out."

A certain live-and-let-live attitude permeates Placencia, and as I amble through town, it's easy to see why. In a 10-minute span I pass Garifuna bartenders, Mayan trinket vendors, Creole shopkeepers, Menonite furniture makers and European backpackers. Nobody's moving too fast. The main street consists of a sandy sidewalk lined with thatched restaurants, dive shops, ramshackle cottages and pastel-colored inns.

Every spring, thousands of body-slaming snapper come to Gladden Spit to spawn.

bly involving the rotation of currents around this promontory, thousands of cubera snapper arrive here to spawn. "This is what the whale sharks come for," she says, flipping on her VCR. On screen, I see a snapper mosh-pit—countless fish flip-flopping all over, males caressing females, individuals changing colors. It's mayhem. At one point, a female rockets toward the surface, followed by a pack of males, creating a big volcano of fish. There's a sudden explosion of eggs and sperm into the water, and murky clouds of genetic material drift across the screen. Then, as if that weren't chaotic enough, a whale shark emerges from one of these clouds. Then another. And another. "I've seen 12 whale sharks at once," says Berry, who shot this footage while working with a team of scientists. "I've

BRANDON D. COLE (RIGHT)

HOPKINS: A JUNGLE PARADISE COMES OF AGE

LOCATED 30 MILES NORTH OF PLACENCIA, Hopkins offers equally pristine reefs in half the boat-trip time. Great wall dives lie 30 minutes away, like **Long Reef** and **Fifth Cut**, where the reef starts at 45 feet and steps down to 120 before the bottom falls out. When you're not watching eagle rays and nurse sharks cruising the edge, explore the amazing sponge life—iridescent lavender vase sponges, vivid green tube sponges, orange and yellow rope sponges. Make like a hawksbill turtle and nose inside the giant, perfectly formed barrel sponges. There's some funky stuff in there: brittle stars, arrow crabs, even lobster and conchs. And if the diving seems idyllic, try the surface interval. The warm sand and swaying palms on diminutive **South Water Caye** cast a spell.

Hopkins is still very much an isolated Garifuna fishing village, so it lacks much of what you'd call tourist infrastructure. The people are friendly, the pace is sweet, and you can't beat the open-air bar in the middle of town called **King Kasava**, where, if you're hankering to watch a game, the bartender will grab the TV from his house and set it up on one of the picnic tables. And the traditional percussion sessions at the **Lebeha Drumming Center** are a must-see. Lodging options are limited to a sprinkling of guesthouses and resorts. It also offers airy verandas, gourmet meals and plenty of those après-dive necessities—hammocks and fruity drinks.



Brittle star.

I settle into an open-air joint on the beach called Cozy Corner, order a Belikin beer and gaze past leaning coconut palms at the turquoise water.

Even if whale sharks weren't spending their spring break here, there's sublime diving beneath these shimmering waters, without the bustle associated with the scuba hot spots of northern Belize. Out at Gladden Reef, spur-and-groove formations zigzag for 15 radiant miles with purple sea fans, green tube sponges and yellow brain corals, all of it lush and healthy in 30 to 80 feet of water. In the Silk Cayes, lobsters, moray eels and channel crabs lurk in crevices along North Wall, which starts at 45 feet and then plummets dramatically for half a mile. At Pompei Canyon, bull and nurse sharks patrol the sandy bottom of a chasm lined with gardens of pink and green lettuce coral.

Sapodillo Toms

AS FOR WHALE SHARKS, folks here have always known about them, but until recently the notion of swimming with them would have been considered lunacy. The first sighting of the shark is credited to a fisherman named Tom Owens, who lived on nearby Sapodillo Caye in the late 1800s. When Owens stumbled into a pub and frantically told of a biblically proportioned fish, most folks thought he'd cracked in the heat. But subsequent sightings by terrified fisher-

men verified Owens's claim, and locals still refer to whale sharks as "Sapodillo Toms."

In the late 1990s, a fisherman named Brian Young relived part of Owens's experience. As one of the few divemasters in Placencia's fledgling scuba industry, Young began taking divers to Gladden Spit, a place fishermen knew was a magnet for Sapodillo Toms. "I would talk about our whale shark

encounters in the bar, and people looked at me like I was crazy," says Young, who now owns Seahorse Dive Shop. Since then, the number of divers coming to see whale sharks has increased each season. "In the past, there were days when it was just me and my guests at Gladden," Young says. "This year, boats are lining up out there."

In 2000, Belize created the Gladden Spit

AMBERGRIS CAYE AND THE ATOLLS

GAZE EAST FROM ANYWHERE along the windward side of Ambergris Caye, and you'll see why this island is the diving hub of Belize. That unbroken string of nearby whitecaps represents dozens of exquisite dive sites on the Belize Barrier Reef, most of them not five minutes away. Many, like *Victoria Canyon*, *Pillar Coral* and *Eagle Ray Alley*, feature spur-and-groove finger canyons bottoming out at 100 feet and encrusted in maze, star and black corals, vase sponges and all manner of gorgonians. Eagle rays with four-foot-plus wingspans patrol these trenches, as do nurse sharks, loggerhead and hawksbill turtles and the occasional hammerhead. Slip on a couple extra pounds and explore the 30-foot-deep reef cut at *Hol Chan Marine Reserve* ("narrow channel" in Mayan), where schools of grunts, mangrove snappers and Nassau groupers linger in the swim-throughs and grottoes.

Ambergris also serves as a jumping-off point for expeditions to Belize's famed atolls—*Turneffe Islands*, *Glovers Reef* and *Lighthouse Reef*—each one a spectacular reef system with mangrove shallows, plunging walls and incomparable marine life. *Turneffe Islands*, the biggest of the atolls, sits closest to the mainland. Here, the must-dive is *Elbow*, a sponge-smothered wall at the atoll's southernmost point. *Lighthouse Reef* lies the greatest distance offshore of the three, but that doesn't stop legions of divers from descending into the *Blue Hole*, a subterranean cave in the middle of a lagoon. To the south is the still largely unexplored *Glovers Reef*, a magnet for manta rays, dolphins and turtles. Each of the atolls has at least one on-island resort with dive facilities. The islands are also easily accessible by live-aboards that depart for weeklong trips out of Belize City.



Beachside baseball in Placencia



Iridescent barrel sponges off Lighthouse Reef, home of the Blue Hole and one of Belize's premier dive destinations.

and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve, a 26,000-acre sanctuary designed to oversee an increasingly busy place. After much community wrangling, the reserve—co-managed by the Belize Fisheries Department and Friends of Nature, a local environmental group—issued diving and fishing regulations that are just now being implemented. Dive boats must stay 200 feet from each other and travel no faster than two knots in the designated “Whale Shark Zone.” Divers must stay above 80 feet to keep from disturbing snapper aggregations. Nobody can touch a whale shark. Fishermen, meanwhile, are limited to 10 skiffs in the sanctuary and are banned from fishing at night, when spawning occurs.

Still, even with everyone onboard, Gladden Spit receives tremendous pressure, mainly from illegal fishermen who slip over from Honduras and Mexico after dark. Berry has gone on wild, high-speed chases in which rangers have had to pull up to fleeing boats and yank the gas lines from their engines. “These guys are serious,” she says

of the poachers. “It’s very risky. Friends of Nature needs more nighttime monitoring. Basically, they need more funding.”

Manic Moon Day

“IT’S A MOON DAY, MON,” Rhamdas warns me on the dock. “The fish do strange things. Probably no whale sharks today.” Rhamdas’s theory, formed from years of fishing, is that whale shark activity increases before and after a full moon, but decreases on the day itself. Still, for the chance to be mesmerized again by a leviathan, I choose to gamble, and we’re soon heading out over glass-calm water. Steering the boat, Rhamdas is the picture of a fisherman—shark tattooed on one forearm, marlin on the other, gold ring in his ear. “Fishing is a lotta hard work,” he says, explaining the transition he and others are making in Placencia. “This is better.”

After an hour we see whitecaps breaking on the reef, and Rhamdas putters up to the anchored ranger boat and hands over our sanctuary passes. Then he motors through the

cut to the choppy waters just outside the reef, where we suit up and roll in. In no time we’re hovering 80 feet over a mess of cubera snapper in pre-spawn mode. No DNA clouds yet, but there’s some serious flipping and flopping going on down there. We soon learn that Rhamdas’s moon-day theory is flawed. A whale shark emerges from the snapper scrum and banks right over us. He briefly greets our snorkelers and then heads for the deep blue. We’re still watching him when another shark appears and cruises in the opposite direction before bending gracefully and diving deep. Then a third shark shows up.

“Three, count ‘em, three,” I tell Rhamdas, climbing back into the boat, calling him to task. He’s too busy taking credit for an incredible dive to notice. “It don’t get no better than that, mon!” he tells the boat. “To have a better dive than that, those suckers would have to get in the boat with us!” **SD**

GET THERE ➤ For more information on Belize, turn to In Depth, page 97, section 4.



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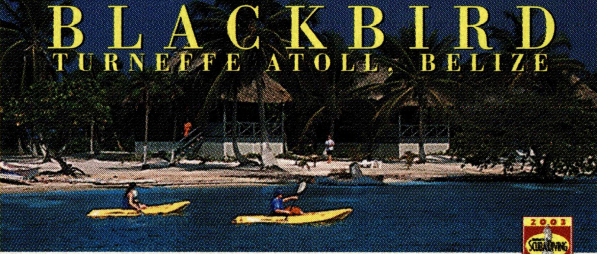
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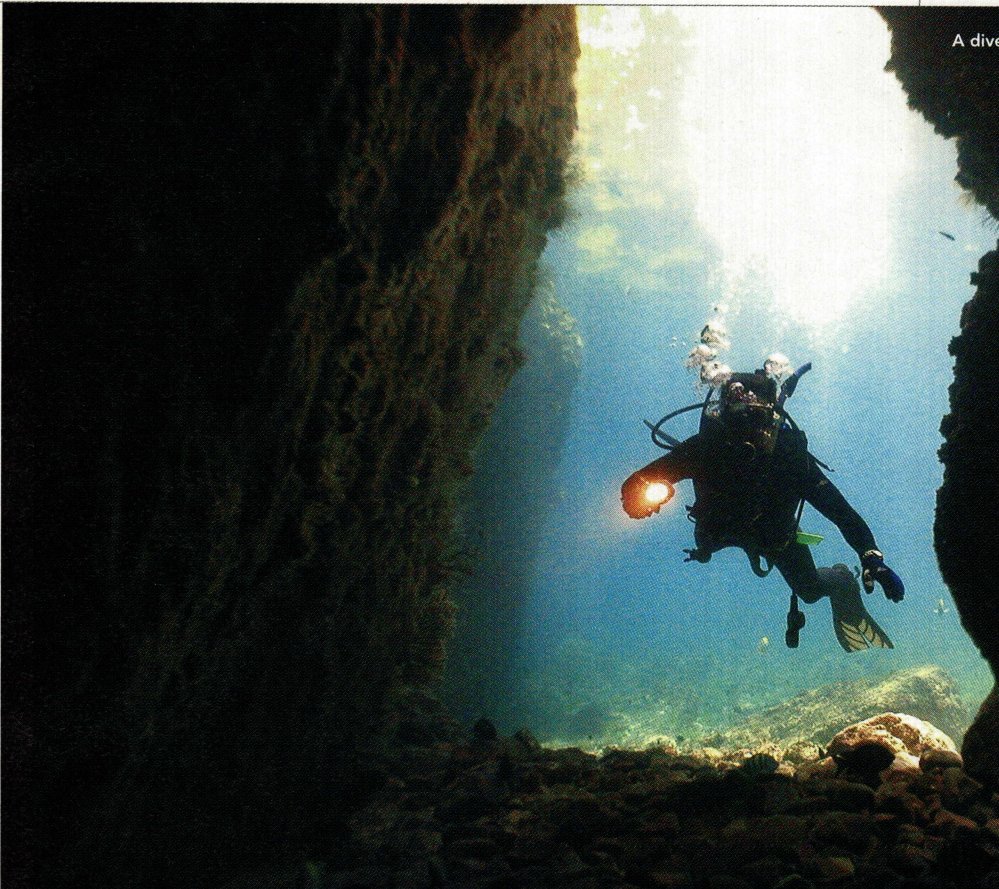


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A diver explores the long, shallow cave under the north point of San Pedro Island.



Downtime in the Sea of Cortez

The laid-back Mexican beach town of San Carlos is an easy-to-reach gateway to unforgettable diving. **BY JD BARNETT**

OUR BOATS heavy with gear, my dive buddy and I rode the turquoise swells of Kino Bay near Hermosillo, Mexico. We were cranky after driving all night from New Mexico, but the spring sun and the rhythm of the waves calmed us as we paddled out for some kayak diving. Suddenly, a loud snort jolted us out of our reveries. A dozen sleek, gray torpedo-look-alikes surrounded us. Leaping clear of the water, a

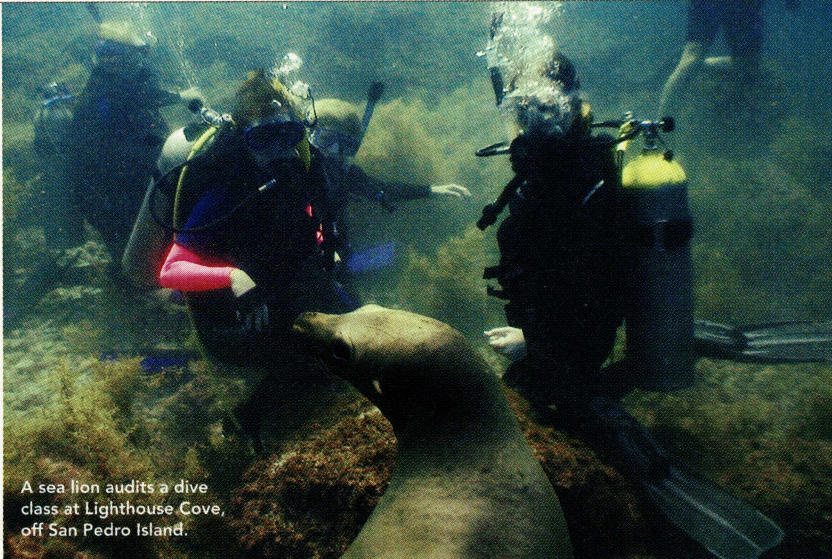
pod of dolphins crisscrossed behind, before and below us in a display of overwhelming grace and power. For 15 minutes they played in our midst, and then, as abruptly as they'd arrived, they were gone. We laid down our paddles and looked at each other in amazement. Welcome to the Sea of Cortez.

Cortez is young as seas go, formed several million years ago when the Baja peninsula broke away from the mainland. It is narrow and deep, a more than 700-mile-long natural fish trap. Volcanic activity created rugged, broken cliffs both above and below the water, which are now the basis of first-rate diving

along the shores of the Mexican state of Sonora. This is one of the most accessible regions in Mexico, and half the fun of diving the Sea of Cortez is driving there. Roadside assistance crews known as Green Angels (from their jade-colored trucks) patrol the highways twice a day. Open-air food vendors tempt travelers with mouth-watering broiled chicken and fresh tacos. For the first-time visitor driving into Mexico, the run down to San Carlos is hard to beat.

San Carlos

FIVE HOURS BY FOUR-LANE highway from Tucson, Ariz., San Carlos attracts divers from throughout the Southwest and as far away as Southern California, Utah and Nevada for long weekends. It offers excellent restaurants and accom-



A sea lion audits a dive class at Lighthouse Cove, off San Pedro Island.

modations, fantastic scenery, phenomenal beaches and top dive operators. Because of dramatic seasonal water temperature variations (from the high 50s in winter to the low 90s in summer), the marine life here includes warm-water types like angelfish

as well as colder-water species such as starfish, yellowtail and sea hares. The heat can be scorching in summer (which is why some divers wait until autumn to make this run), but that's when visibility is at its peak: count on 100 feet or more.

Lalo Cove

NESTLED BETWEEN the Punta San Antonio overlook and the tall red rocks of Cerro Tetakawi are two beautiful coves with the finest shore diving in the northern Sea of Cortez. Beach entries are easy here, and there's enough varied terrain within them for multiple dives. At Lalo Cove, rocky reefs are interspersed with sand flats and dense patches of seaweed. The reefs are 40 to 50 feet deep and host morays, scorpionfish and king angelfish. Octopuses are commonly found hiding in the rocks by day and hunting in the flats at night, while rays and the occasional angel shark prowl the sand.

Frenchie's Cove

TO REACH FRENCHIE'S COVE, follow the dirt road past Lalo Cove

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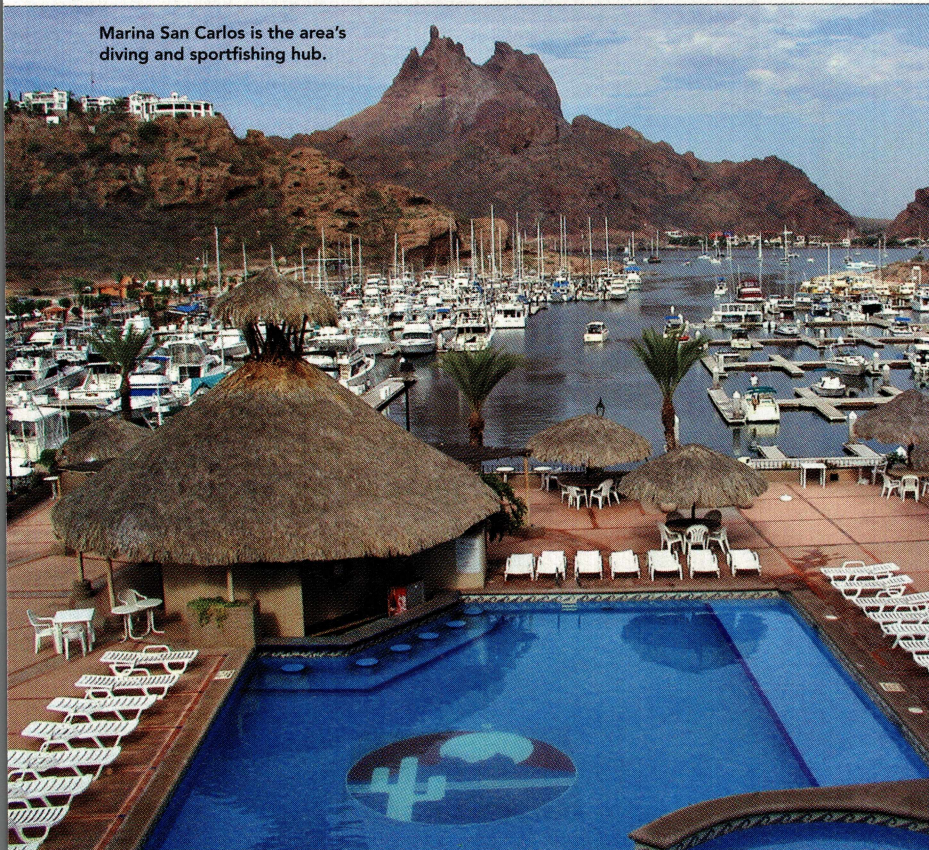
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DRIVE AND DIVE

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toward the rock towers of Tetakawi. The best diving here is actually along the finger of land that separates Frenchie's and Lalo coves. Huge chunks of fallen rock and small caves line the entire north side of the cove, sheltering rich and diverse sea life. Shore diving is superb within 100 yards of the beach, but the far reaches of the cove are best accessed by kayak.

Eagle Rock

EAGLE ROCK, off a peninsula near San Carlos Bay, offers spectacular top-side views of a sheer red cliff studded with giant saguaros. With the twin towers of Tetakawi to the north and the open sea to the west, the site is an alien landscape worthy of a science fiction novel. Kayak or swim out along the cliff about halfway to the end of the peninsula. Begin the dive on the far side of the rock

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mass and descend 65 feet to the sandy bottom. Swim through the rocks toward the cliff wall, among the stands of black coral and clouds of small baitfish, and you're guaranteed to see dozens of different species of fish.

Lalo Rock

LALO ROCK, another good site for kayak divers, lies a half mile out from the beach at Frenchie's Cove. The rock is visible even at high tide and is a favorite hangout for pelicans. The rock's many ledges house morays, black coral and a dazzling array of Christmas tree worms. Watch for large schools of yellowtail in winter months.

Presidente Diaz Ordaz

ABOUT SIX MILES north of San Carlos is the wreck of the *Presidente Diaz*

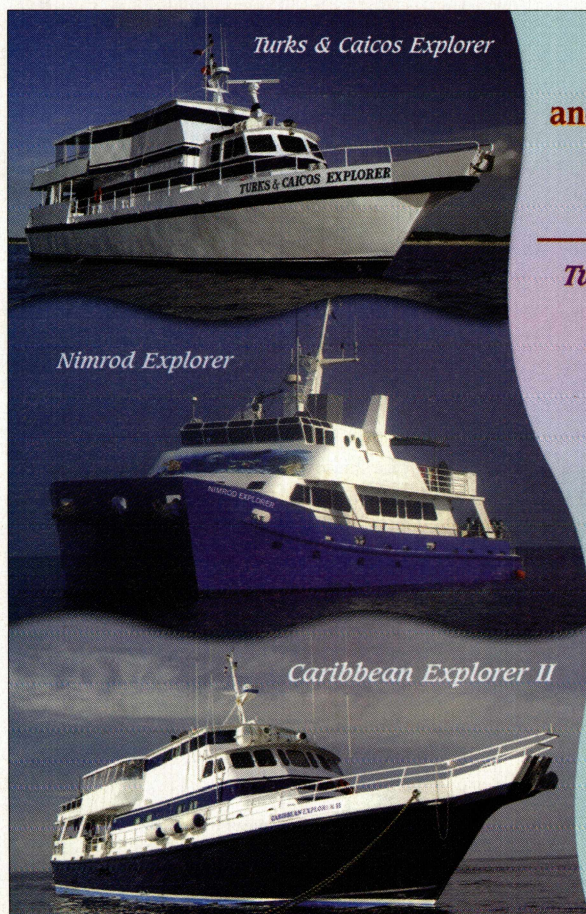
Ordaz, a ferry damaged in 1984 and then sunk by the Mexican government to create a local dive attraction. The majestic 330-foot boat sits upright on a sandy bottom in 65 feet of water, surrounded by schools of parrotfish, morays, triggers and angels. The hull is intact, right down to the huge screws and double rudders, and there are large openings in the cavernous hold that can be entered by those so inclined and trained. Dive boats from San Carlos regularly make the 30-minute trip.

San Pedro Island

PERCHED ON THE EDGE of the mile-deep Guaymas Trench 17 miles northwest of San Carlos is the barren rock of San Pedro, home to a population of extraordinarily friendly sea lions. Visibility in the waters around Seal Island, as San

Pedro is called by gringos, often tops 100 feet in late summer and early fall. In addition to its sociable pinnipeds, this site is noted for caves, swim-throughs and pinacles. And the 90-minute boat ride from San Carlos is a thrill in itself: There's whale-watching in the winter, breaching sailfish in the summer and several species of dolphin year-round.

Dive boats often head for Lighthouse Cove, on the island's east side, where they are met by the raucous calls of sea lions. Divers have plenty of opportunities to play with youngsters and females, while huge bulls patrol the shoreline like whiskered submarines, warning intruders away from the rookery. Rocky ledges start at the water's edge and drop 65 feet to sand flats. Though the sea lions are the highlight of any dive here, the cove also teems with colorful parrotfish,



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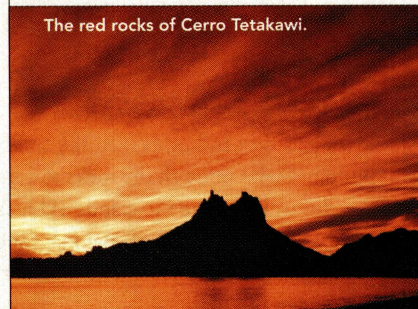


CoZuMe!

Package prices reflect low season travel dates, blackout dates apply. Contact these partners for details.

DRIVE AND DIVE

The red rocks of Cerro Tetakawi.



grunts, snappers, rays and eels.

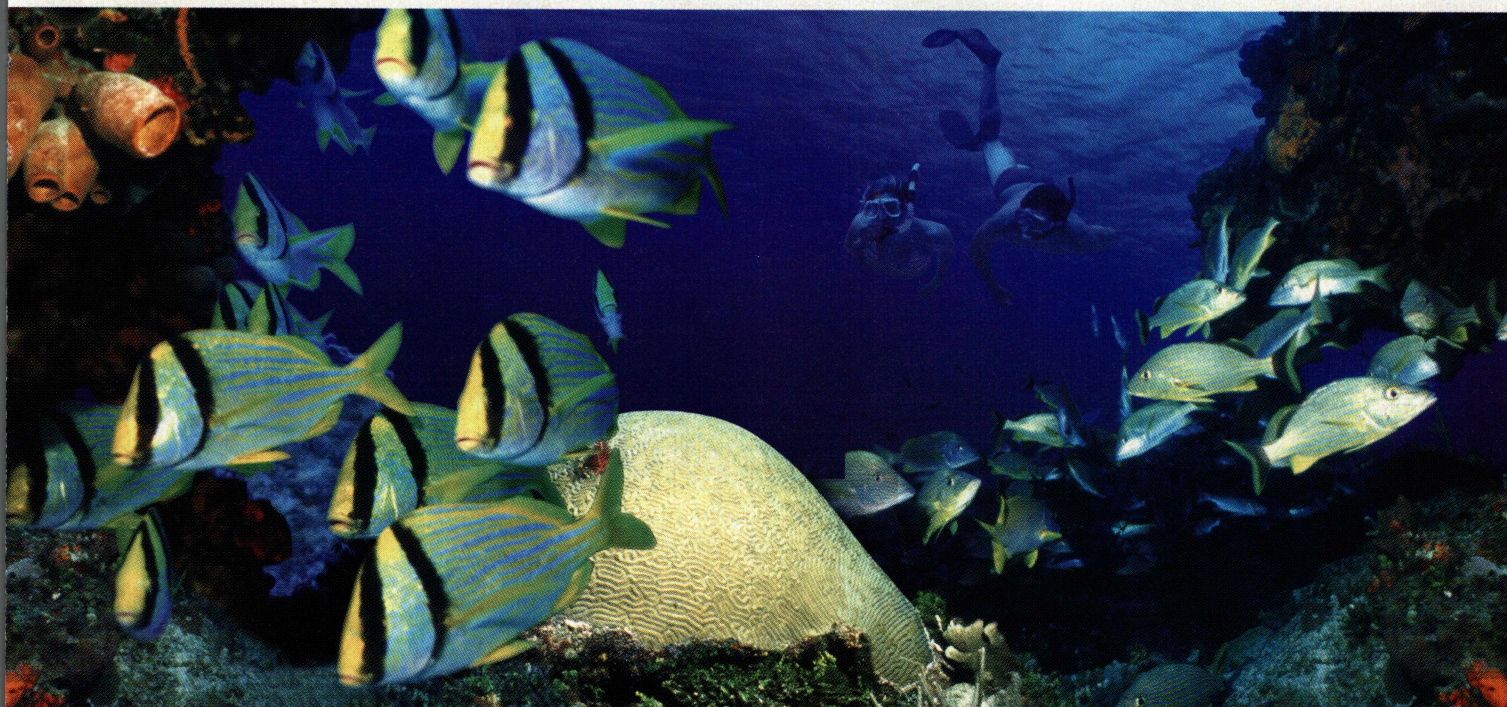
South Point, at the tip of the island, is one of the most striking dive sites in the Sea of Cortez. Pinnacles thrust up from the seafloor and form an underwater alpine landscape of ridges, cuts and valleys. Exposed to waves and strong currents, this site is dived only in calm weather, and the convoluted terrain requires serious underwater navigation skills. The many fish that cruise the point attract predators, hammerhead sharks among them, looking for easy meals.

Kino Bay

DRIVE 75 MILES north from San Carlos to Hermosillo, and then head west to Kino Bay, a magnificent body of water offering many unexplored dive sites. Kino Bay is for the truly adventurous and self-sufficient, since there's no reliable source of compressed air in the area. Enter the water at the north end of the bay from the shore or by kayak and explore the rocky point at the end of the beach. In the sand flats you'll find a population of electric rays and Cortez halibut, while the rocks shelter sergeant majors, parrotfish, angels and damselfish. A stop at Kino Bay is a sensational way to finish any northern Sea of Cortez dive trip. **SD**

GET THERE > For more information
on San Carlos, turn to In Depth,
page 97, section 3.

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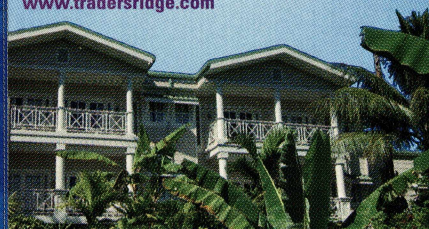
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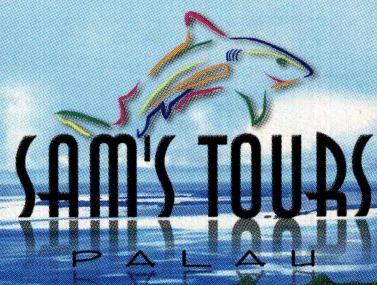
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14 Great Packages

Save money on destinations from the Mayan Riviera to Rangiroa.

COZUMEL, MEXICO

Fall Fiesta

1 THE DEAL: Iberostar Cozumel's fall special includes seven nights' accommodations, all meals and unlimited bar, five days of two-tank boat diving, taxes, nightly entertainment, theme parties and an array of daily activities. Rates are \$899 p.p., dbl. occ., and kids up to age 12 stay free when they stay with both parents. The Fall Fiesta special is valid Sept. 1 to Nov. 20 and Nov. 28 to Dec. 22, 2004. Iberostar Dive Vacations also arranges discount airfare to the island. (866-423-7678, dive@iberostar-hotels.com)

TOBAGO

Save \$200 on Peter Hughes' *Wind Dancer*

2 THE DEAL: Spend seven nights on the Peter Hughes' *Wind Dancer* live-aboard in Tobago for \$200 off the regular price. The package includes up to five dives per day, all meals, drinks and alcoholic beverages, airport transfers and more. Charter dates for Thanksgiving week are Nov. 20-27, 2004, and the all-inclusive (boat only) price is \$1,295 p.p., dbl. occ. Some restrictions apply. (800-932-6237, www.peterhughes.com)

KAUAI, HAWAII

Nitrox Madness

3 THE DEAL: Receive free nitrox for your entire trip through September 2004 when you get nitrox-certified with Seasport Divers. And, if you are already nitrox-certified, you can have free nitrox on all charters to Niihau, "the forbidden

island." It's likely a dive off Niihau will put you face-to-face with Hawaiian monk seals, which are native to the island. To receive this special, you must mention *Scuba Diving* and Nitrox Madness when making the reservation. (800-685-5889, www.kauaiscubadiving.com)

TURKS & CAICOS

Free Diving

4 THE DEAL: When you visit Providenciales, Turks & Caicos, and stay at one of the Ocean Club Resorts or Turtle

eclectic mix of entertainment. (800-241-0824, www.turksandcaicostourism.com)

GRAND CAYMAN

Flight and Accommodations, \$799

5 THE DEAL: Seaview Hotel offers a package that includes a nonstop flight from Chicago with seven nights at the Seaview Hotel on Seven Mile Beach. Mention *Scuba Diving* for a free welcome drink. The add-on dive package with Seaview Divers is an additional \$399 p.p., and includes six days of two-tank morning dives and tanks and weights for unlimited shore diving. The price is \$799 p.p., dbl. occ., taxes included, through Dec. 15, 2004. Some blackout dates apply. (866-945-0558, www.seaviewdivers.com)



Stay seven nights, dive five days at Iberostar Cozumel for \$899.

Cove Inn, you'll receive two days of free diving with Provo Turtle Divers if you mention *Scuba Diving* when booking. Blackout dates are Dec. 20, 2004, through Jan. 3, 2005. The offer is valid until March 1, 2005. (800-833-1431, www.provoturtle-divers.com)

You can use this Provo Turtle Divers special to coincide with the Turks & Caicos Music and Poetry Festival Sept. 1-5, 2004. Join Maxi Priest, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, Boyz II Men, Chaka Khan and Kim Fields at the festival, which features an

CURAÇAO

Suite Spectacular

6 THE DEAL: Habitat Curaçao offers a 25 percent discount on four- and seven-night stays. The seven-night package includes accommodations, 24-hour unlimited shore diving, buffet breakfast daily, welcome cocktail and free town shuttle. Accommodations in a garden-view suite start at \$615 p.p., dbl. occ., and \$699 in an ocean-view suite, available through August 2004. Add six boat dives for \$93 or 12 boat dives for \$198.

Habitat Curaçao offers oceanfront dining, massage and spa services, fitness center, nearby hiking trails and 24-hour diving. The dive operation offers beginner to instructor dive courses, nitrox, rebreathers and lots more. (800-327-6709, curacao@maduro.com, www.habitatcuracao.com)

RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO

Dog Days of Summer

7^{THE DEAL:} Lucky Fish Diving in Mexico offers two ocean dives, two cenote dives, one night dive and a free kayak rental. You'll spend four nights in a beachfront guesthouse at Tankah Inn with breakfast included. The price is \$325 p.p.,

dbl. occ., through September 2004. (www.lucky-fish-diving.com)

ST. LUCIA

Romance and Adventure

8^{THE DEAL:} St. Lucia's Anse Chastanet Resort has created a special Romance and Adventure package with seven nights' accommodations, 12 beach or boat dives, including tanks, weights, mask, snorkel and fins. Also included in the package are airport transfers, full American meal plan, all tax and service charges, a welcome drink and fruit basket. Other activities include jungle biking on 12 miles of private trails, coastal kayaking, sailing on the 42-foot yacht *Serenity* and guided estate walks. The package is valid Nov. 1 to Dec. 19, 2004, for \$1,599 p.p., dbl. occ., excluding marine park fee. (888-465-8242, anse-chastanet@candw.lc)

RANGIROA, FRENCH POLYNESIA

Stay Seven Nights, Pay For Six

9^{THE DEAL:} Enjoy a seven-night stay at a six-night price at the Rangiroa Beach Resort in a garden bungalow and 10 dives with the Raie Manta Club. The package, offered by Dive Tahiti Blue, includes daily breakfast and dinner, taxes, transfers and inter-island airfare. Price is approximately \$2,113 through Dec. 31, 2004 (the price varies according to the daily exchange rate). International air is priced separately. Mention *Scuba Diving* to receive an extra dive for free. (www.divetahitiblue.com)

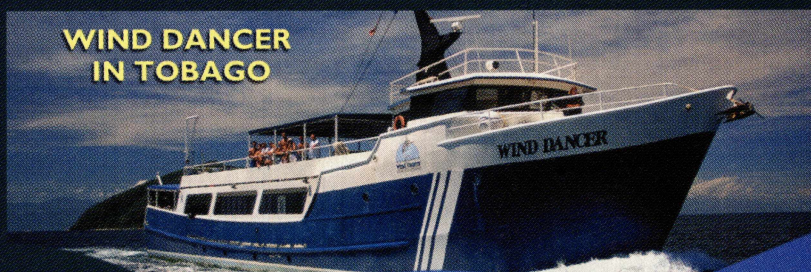
BELIZE

Private Caye Getaway

10^{THE DEAL:} Robert's Grove Inn, located on the Placencia Peninsula along Belize's southern coast, now owns two private cayes. The introductory, all-inclusive Swept Away packages range from one to six nights and include round-

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trip boat transfers, accommodations, three meals daily, water sports equipment, most beverages, and tax and service charges. Rates begin at \$323 p.p., dbl. occ., per night, through Dec. 31, 2004. An entire island accommodating six persons is available for under \$2,000 per night. Diving and fishing can be arranged. (800-565-9757, www.robertsgrove.com)

MAUI, HAWAII

Maui for \$75 a Day

11 THE DEAL: Fall exclusive packages, just for *Scuba Diving* readers, include seven nights' accommodations, four days of jet boat diving with Scuba Shack, tanks and weights, and the use of state-of-the-art dive gear. The first package is \$800 p.p., dbl. occ., and when you reserve the first discounted package, Scuba Shack offers an additional seven-night, four-day dive package for only \$300 p.p. when all guests share one of Scuba Shack's two-bedroom loft condos at Kamaole Sands. Both prices are valid through Dec. 15, 2004, excluding Thanksgiving week. (877-213-4488, www.scubashack.com)

BECOME A STAR IN KEY WEST

DONORS WHO contribute \$250 or more to the Florida Keys' Eco-Discovery Center will have their names engraved on the sea star-shaped concrete tiles on the center's walkway. Donors of smaller amounts will receive a car decal, mug or T-shirt. The Eco-Discovery Center, slated to open in the summer of 2005, will be located at the Truman Annex in Key West. The center will feature exhibits on the Florida Keys and focus on human interaction with the environment, the management of protected marine areas, and the maritime culture and history of the area. (305-296-3823, www.nmsfocean.org/NMSFDonate)

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Summer Super Savings

12 THE DEAL: The U.S. Virgin Islands Commissioner of Tourism has announced a destination-wide Summer Super Saver promotion that includes a \$50 American Express traveler's check

and discounted accommodations on St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas with one additional night free when travelers book a minimum four-night stay (a minimum of five nights on St. John) at a participating hotel or resort. As an added bonus, book this promotion with an American Express card and receive a local coupon booklet

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October

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November

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December

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DIVE DEALS

worth up to \$500 in gifts and discounts. The promotion is valid for travel through Aug. 31, 2004, and must be booked by Aug. 15, 2004. Blackout dates may apply at select properties. This offer cannot be combined with other promotions and is not valid on pre-existing reservations. (800-372-8784, www.usvitourism.vi)

GUADALUPE ISLAND

Shark Dive in Mexico

13 THE DEAL: Absolute Adventures/Shark Diver takes divers of all experience levels on a five-day trip to Guadalupe, Mexico, to cage dive with great white sharks September through December 2004. The five-day trip departs from San Diego, Calif., and includes accommodations on an 86-foot live-aboard, three or four one-hour dives per day, all meals, snacks and beverages, Mexican permits, fishing gear and bait. When you return from the trip, you get a CD of your trip's shark diving photos, as well as a DVD movie of the trip. The rate is \$2,450. (415-235-9410, www.sharkdiver.com)

ST. EUSTATIUS

Fifth Person Free

14 THE DEAL: Golden Rock Dive Center and the Old Gin House offer a fall special that includes seven nights' accommodations in a garden room, 12 boat dives, hotel tax, airport transfers, full breakfast daily and one three-course gourmet dinner. The package rate is \$692 p.p., dbl. occ., through Dec. 15, 2004. In groups where there are four paying divers, a fifth person goes free. (888-462-8875, www.caribbeandivevacations.com)

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Top Value Dive Destinations

When you're spending your hard-earned diving dollars, you want to go to dive destinations that don't cost an arm and a fin.

GIVEN A scuba diving scenario, the MasterCard commercial would go something like this: T-shirt with dive shop logo: \$20. Two-tank dive trip: \$55. High-performance regulator: \$600. Diving with your 16-year-old son for the very first time and seeing a whale shark—well, you know the tagline.

For sure, there are some things in life that money can't buy, and you can use a credit card for everything else. But budget-conscious divers trying to stretch their vacation dollars want bargains. Our thrifty readers have voted on the destinations that are easy on your wallet or credit card—and it just so happens that the diving is worth every penny.

(SCORE: 96.3)

1 British Columbia

OVER THE YEARS, British Columbia has led a number of our "Top 100" lists in North America. In 2004, B.C. was ranked first in the overall destination, marine life, healthiest marine environment, shore diving and small animals categories, and ranked in the top five in big animal, wall diving and wreck diving. With all that bang for your buck, it's no wonder B.C. was also

Thanks to affordable prices and unique experiences—like getting cozy with a wolf eel—British Columbia was voted the top dive value in the world.

BRANDON COLE

READER RATINGS

ranked first in the value category. Affordable accommodations range from rustic campsites with picnic tables (about \$21 a night) to comfortable cottages with kitchens (about \$100 a night) or cabins where home-cooked meals are included in the package price. Three-day to seven-night live-aboard itineraries, from about \$500 for a three-day trip, are a popular option.

(SCORE: 96.2)

2Yap, Micronesia

SEVEN NIGHTS at a luxury resort in Yap will cost you a pretty penny—more than \$1,500 per person—but there are more modest accommodations in the Colonia area that are priced at under \$1,000 and even under \$800 per person for a weeklong stay, includ-

The Flower Garden Banks offers Caribbean-style diving without the international airfare.

ing diving. Yap has a lot to offer, but the main attraction is diving with mantas in the channels between the open Pacific Ocean and Yap's shallow lagoon. Local dive operators can get divers to the mantas, as well as to Yap's healthy outer reefs where you'll find everything from mantis shrimp to sharks.

(SCORE: 95.1)

3Flower Garden Banks

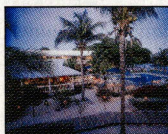
THE NORTHERNMOST coral reefs in the U.S.—105 miles south of the Texas and Louisiana border—got their name from turn-of-the-19th-century



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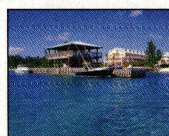
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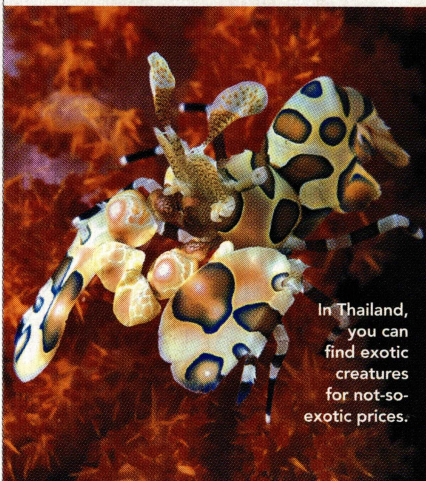
fishermen who likened the area's shallow-water corals and sponges to flowers. The boats that make the overnight trips to the Flower Gardens are not the most luxurious live-aboards in the world, but a two-day trip costs less than \$400, and you're guaranteed good food, comfortable if basic accommodations and great diving.

(SCORE: 94.4)

4 Thailand

FOR ABOUT 32,000 Thai bahts—roughly \$800—live-aboards offer weeklong itineraries to the Andaman Sea's Similan Islands, Burma Banks and Mergui Archipelago. It's possible to stay in a luxury hotel in Phuket, an island connected by a bridge to the heel of Thailand's boot-

shaped peninsula, for about \$100 a night. Phuket is the hub of land-based diving, and two-tank dive trips to reefs that are home to some of the world's most exotic creatures, including tiger-tail seahorses, ghost pipefish, harlequin shrimp and cuttlefish, cost about \$55.



In Thailand, you can find exotic creatures for not-so-exotic prices.

(SCORE: 92.7)

5 Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras

THANKS TO AFFORDABLE accommodations and cheap eats, funky Utila in Honduras's Bay Islands is popular among backpackers and budget travelers trying to stretch their lempiras. Prices are lower here than elsewhere in the Bay Islands—for about \$25 budget travelers can get three meals a day and sleep in a clean room. Bonus: the dive sites off Utila—from the west side's shallow coral reefs to the southeast end's walls and caves to the submerged mountains whose summits reach to recreational diving depths—get less dive traffic than the sites off the other Bay Islands. Ten dives, including all equipment, will run you about \$125—that's \$12.50 a dive.

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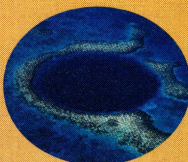
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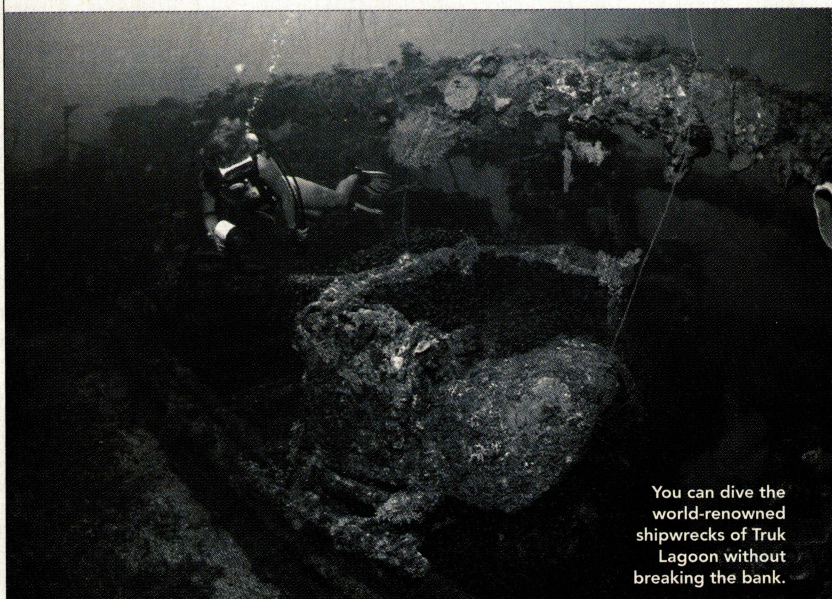
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Aggressor Fleet is a franchise company.

READER RATINGS



You can dive the world-renowned shipwrecks of Truk Lagoon without breaking the bank.

(SCORE: 92.6)

6 Truk, Micronesia

WRECK DIVING aficionados can dive Truk Lagoon's collection of sunken World War II Japanese naval vessels and stay at either land-based hotels or on get-a-lot-for-your-money live-aboards. Standard accommodations and dive packages for the week are available for under \$1,000, and seven-day live-aboard trips run just over \$2,000 per person.

(SCORE: 91.7)

7 Egyptian Red Sea

JORDAN AND ISRAEL also offer access to Red Sea diving, but Egypt has the largest, most easily accessible shoreline, a well-developed tourism and diving infrastructure, plus a protected marine park, Ras Mohammed. Hotel and villa rentals offer accommodations at very reasonable prices, but live-aboards are probably the way to go for U.S. divers. Expect to spend just under \$1,000 for a seven-night itinerary, including meals and diving.

(SCORE: 90.9)

8 Papua New Guinea

PNG IS KNOWN as the last frontier on earth, and while that's been changing in recent years, this is still a South Pacific paradise, rich in culture and diving. PNG can be a bit pricey, so you'll have to do your homework to find the deals. Accommodations and diving at resorts on islands in the Kimbe Bay area can cost about \$2,400 for the week, but a few resorts cut rates by as much as 40 percent during the rainy season (January through March). Seven-night itineraries on luxury live-aboards start at about \$1,800 per person, including meals, beverages, transfers and up to five dives a day. It's possible to find rates discounted by as much as \$600; check the "special deal" areas of live-aboard web sites.

(SCORE: 89)

9 Southeast Florida

DIVERS FAMILIAR with the southeast coast of Florida—from

TIM ROCK

the northern edge of Palm Beach County to Miami at the southern tip of the mainland—appreciate the lush reefs and dramatic wrecks. If you're not a daytripping local, you'll find a number of comfortable and clean budget hotels along the I-95 corridor. And a fleet of dive boats will get divers to the best sites for about \$60 for daylong three-tank trips.

(SCORE: 88)

10 Cozumel BARGAIN-BASEMENT

prices are not the only reason cost-conscious divers flock to Cozumel. Mexico's largest Caribbean island offers eye-popping reefs and drop-offs, laid-back drift diving, year-round, 100-foot visibility and warm water. Most of the island's dive sites are protected by a national marine park. With lots of accommodations and dive operator options, it's hard to top Cozumel's vacation value: Seven nights' accommodations, five days' diving and daily buffet breakfast start from about \$500 per person at many hotels and resorts. **SD**

HOW WE GOT THE SCORES

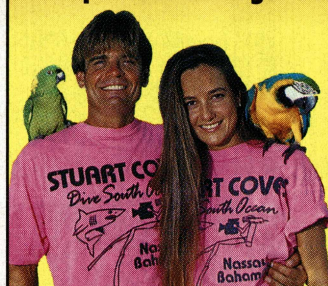
RESULTS ARE based on a response of more than 6,000 surveys. Readers rated dive destinations in a variety of categories on a scale of one to five. Scores listed here represent the percentage of fours (very good) and fives (excellent) awarded to each of these destinations in the value category. A minimum number of responses was required for a destination to be included in these ratings.

So much more than sharks

"For 25 years we have been exploring the reefs, wrecks and coral walls of Nassau. During this time we have discovered the best of what Nassau has to offer. So whether you're visiting us for the first time or returning for the 10th time, we always have something new and unique to amaze and thrill you."

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Delta Connection

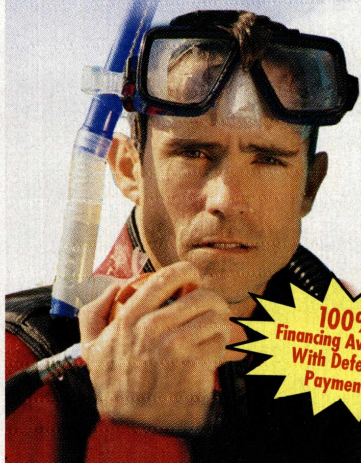
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GREAT

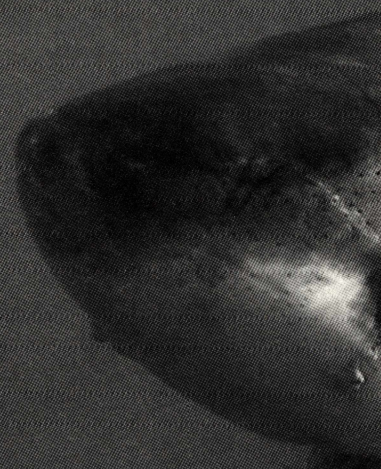
FOR CAGE-RATTLING,
ADRENALINE-PUMPING
GREAT WHITE ACTION,
YOU'VE GOT TO GO WHERE
THE SHARKS ARE.

We'd been working the white sharks off Gansbaai, South Africa, for a couple of days and had some tantalizingly close encounters, but still hadn't nailed the definitive bite shot. I wanted jaws agape and jagged teeth exposed, an image of ferocity and power, the illustration of the iconic great white shark we all love and fear. This day we'd invited friends and family to watch the action from a second boat as our group of hard-core shark shooters tried to entice a great white within camera range.

We soon had a player, and it was my delusional strategy to lie on my belly on the swim platform with my camera half-in, half-out of the water while shark wrangler Andre Hartman lured the shark ever closer. With Andre straddling my prone form and reeling the bait toward the boat I kept chanting "closer, closer, closer." Andre kept chanting "watch your ass, watch your ass, watch your ass" as the shark followed and homed in on the bait.

My eye was pressed to the viewfinder and my camera's motor drive was racing when the shark suddenly filled the frame, open-mouthed. Then, *bam!* The shark's snout rammed my dome port, slamming the housing against my forehead. From all around me, I heard a collective "Are you OK?" But then a tiny voice from the other boat cut through the cacophony. My nine-year-old daughter wanted to know the truly important thing:

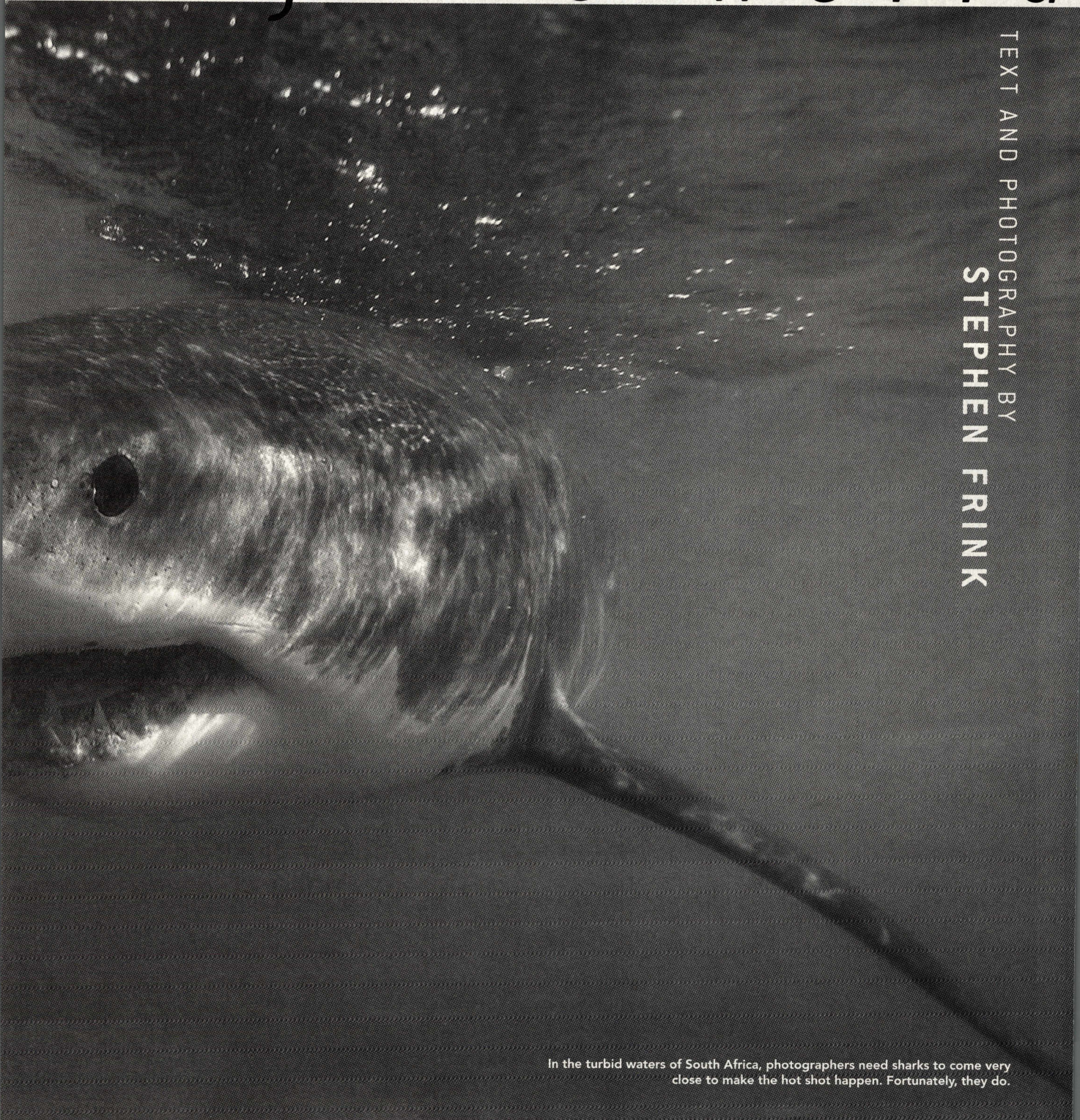
"Daddy, did you get the shot?"



WHITES

of the world

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
STEPHEN FRINK



In the turbid waters of South Africa, photographers need sharks to come very close to make the hot shot happen. Fortunately, they do.

I did get the shot. But as with all photography of great white sharks, it took a combination of skill, luck and, maybe most importantly, proximity. A shark shooter has to go where white sharks are, and while they may range throughout the world, there are just three locations where dive operators reliably and safely put divers in proximity with *Carcharodon carcharias*: South Africa, South Australia and Guadalupe Island, Mexico.

In an effort to compare these three global hot spots for white sharking, I embarked on three photo expeditions in an eight-month time frame, each timed to coincide with the best season for each destination. July 2003 took me to South Africa; October 2003 to Guadalupe; and in February 2004 I visited South Australia. While myriad variables can change the dynamic for any shark encounter, here was an opportunity to compare how these white shark Meccas stack up against one another.

South Africa

Trip Log: Today I had a few magic passes while in the cage. When all the elements were perfectly aligned, I could get a shark close (anything farther than three feet away simply would not work in this turbid water), mouth open, and no bait in the frame. My digital LCD confirmed I had a hot series in the bank.

I shot my next sequence while sitting on the side of the cage as the shark shredded a tuna head not more than three feet away. The motor drive raced as the action peaked. Once the shark slid back in the water I realized the last few shots looked kind of blurry. I found my dome smeared in tuna blood and shreds of meat. Then, wiping my face, I found I was also drenched in blood and detritus. Fortunately, the blood wasn't mine, and this was, after all, why I'd come to South Africa—to get close enough to the action to have to wipe fish flesh off my face.



South Africa appeared on photographers' collective radar screens in the late 1990s as images began to filter back from Dyer Island, just off the fishing village of Gansbaai. Topside shots were particularly impressive. David Doubilet got the cover of

National Geographic with a "jawing" shot, a killer vertical image looking straight down the cavernous maw of a great white. Meanwhile, in nearby False Bay, Chris Fallows was amazing photo editors and film crews with breaching whites. In a graphic demonstration of power, these white sharks actually launch themselves fully out of the water in pursuit of a seal decoy.

One huge plus to the South Africa itinerary is that it can be done in conjunction with a wildlife safari in either South Africa or Botswana. This year we toured two of the finest safari camps in Botswana and then traveled overland from Capetown to Gansbaai. Once in Gansbaai, there are a number of bed-and-breakfasts that cater to the white shark set, or you can opt for more upscale accommodations at Grootbos Nature Preserve. Unlike South Australia and Guadalupe, which must be dived from a live-aboard boat, the white shark encounters from Dyer Island are done as day trips.

Because it's only about a 30-minute boat ride to Dyer Island from Gansbaai, this is the perfect opportunity for someone who wants to notch white sharks on their experiential dive belt but doesn't want to spend a week sleeping on a boat. During the white shark season (late May through August), scores of day-trippers make the pilgrimage to Gansbaai, and many of the boats are devoted to this rather casual end of the trade. Other boat operators cater more exclusively to serious professional photographers and film crews, which can make for curious bedfellows as boats compete for the attention of whatever white sharks may be working that day. There can easily be a dozen boats on location, but when you have the attention of one particularly willing player, none of that matters.



To get this shot, just lie face-down on the swim platform and lure a rowdy shark to the back of the boat.



It can be extremely frustrating to sit on a boat with zero activity while an aggressive, photogenic shark makes repeated passes for the boat next door.

the scoop

CONDITIONS: Visibility ranges from 10 to 30 feet, and water temperature is usually in the mid-60s. Surface conditions vary from slick calm to very rough. White sharking is hard to do in more than a four-foot sea, so on very rough days the boats tend to stay home.

THE GOOD: Lots of sharks and skilled operators able to deliver compelling shark action. Many boat operators

offer encounters as a day trip.

THE BAD: Lots of boats and competition for the sharks, plus potential for bad weather any time of year.

THE UGLY: Sitting on a boat under perfect conditions with absolutely no shark action, while just 15 yards away another shooter has an aggressive shark that comes repeatedly to pose for him. Been there, done that. I did not have fun that day.

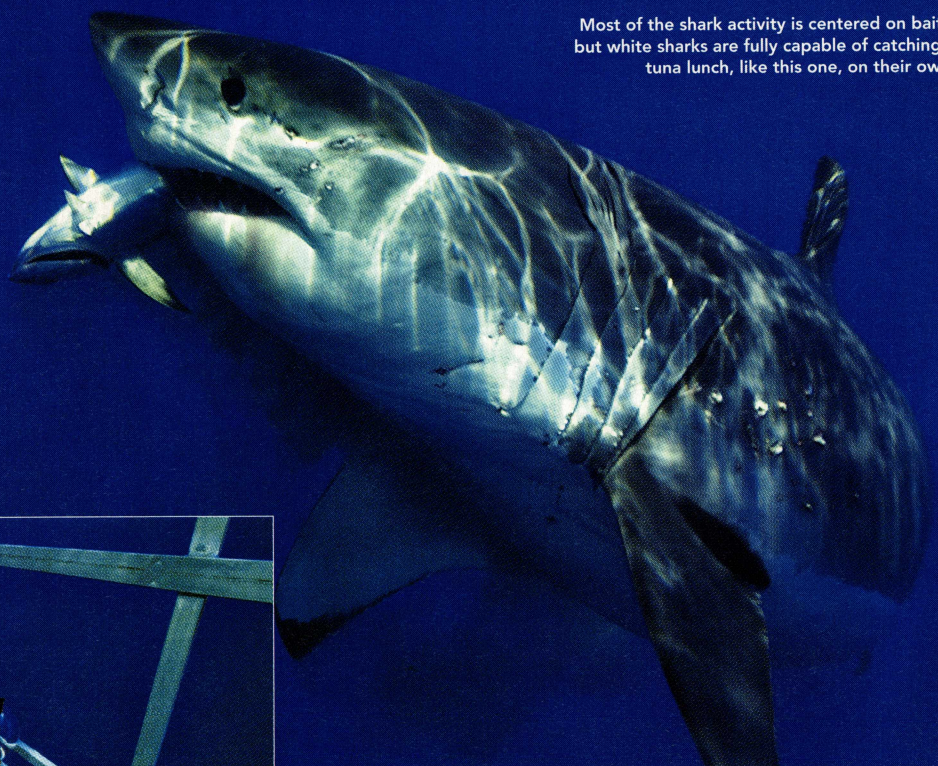
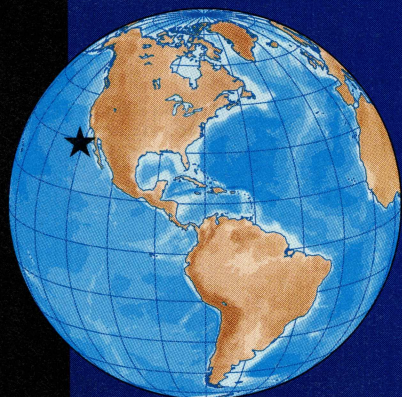
While South Africa can deliver both underwater and topside photo ops with great whites, the water clarity is usually 15 to 20 feet, so it takes a very close encounter to create a high-quality image. The seas can be quite rough as well, so it can be uncomfortable inside the cage at times. But the sharks are here in abundance, and when properly motivated, they will approach quite closely.

South Africa great whites are best known for giving photographers the chance to capture “jawing” on film. This behavior was discovered by Andre Hartman and is now replicated by other local shark wranglers. A great white is lured to the back of the boat and then, just as it opens its mouth for the bait, the wrangler places his fingers along the snout and pushes the shark into an upright position. Then, in a kind of immobile trance, the shark will pause momentarily on the surface with mouth open, sometimes long enough to let you burn 36 shots in a rapid motor-drive sequence.

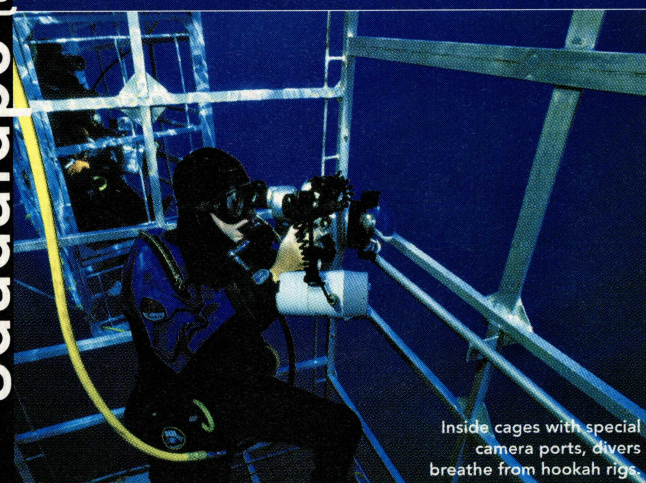
Guadalupe

Trip Log: I’m still looking for the definitive “bite shot”—something to define the power and predatory force of the great white shark, and today I enjoyed the best underwater shark action I’ve ever had the privilege to view. When Ms. Attitude swam into the scene, she promptly ripped into the underwater “bait-cam.” Then, amped up in attack mode, or maybe jolted from just biting through an electrical cable, she came and hit the baits just a few feet in front of the cage. The shark wrangler prolonged the duel as long as he could, but inevitably the landlord got her share. Big and powerful, this shark sliced through the tuna effortlessly.

For this performance, I was situated in the hot spot: the outside slot on the starboard cage. This spot had offered the most consistently propitious camera angles all week, but I had not yet had a turn there. This was my one and only chance for that spot, and getting the right real estate and a brazen shark made my day. Actually, that 10 minutes was justification enough for the trip.



Most of the shark activity is centered on baits, but white sharks are fully capable of catching a tuna lunch, like this one, on their own.



Inside cages with special camera ports, divers breathe from hookah rigs.

In the past few years, white sharking has developed off Guadalupe Island, a 22-hour boat ride into Mexican waters south of San Diego. Guadalupe is known for stunningly clear water and a large, albeit seasonal, population of white sharks. There may be as many as 100 white sharks around the island in October and November, but there may be two or three boats visiting there in the heart of the season as well. For underwater shots of white sharks in clear water, Guadalupe is all the buzz these days.

To get there, you'll board a live-aboard boat in San Diego in the morning and steam all day and night to the site. There, sheltered

behind the monolithic island, you'll enjoy crystalline water clarity and calm seas as a pair of four-person shark cages are deployed from the stern. The boats typically accommodate 16 passengers, and the drill is four divers in each cage for one-hour shifts.

On our trip, the first shark showed up when we dropped the hook, and throughout our three shoot days we were never without sharks at the cage. The consistency of action is excellent in Guadalupe, but the one-hour shifts in the cage take some getting used to. I've found the girls are prettier around closing time, and the sharks are friskier just about the time your shift in the cage is done.

There isn't much opportunity for topside shark shots here, but for underwater shots, this really is the place. In the first day at Guadalupe, I had already captured more and better underwater shots than I had in three previous trips to South Australia and two to South Africa. And it just keeps getting better as the sharks become more acclimated to the action and the dive operators become more skilled at shark wrangling.

the scoop

CONDITIONS: Water clarity can exceed 100 feet, and temperature ranges from mid- to high 60s. The seas are usually calm in the protected bays where the boats anchor and deploy cages, although the ride to and from Guadalupe can be a challenge for anyone prone to seasickness.

THE GOOD: Lots of sharks and excellent in-water conditions. Very reasonably priced, especially considering that the live-

aboard boats depart from San Diego.

THE BAD: Each cage has one position where encounters are more likely, obviously the corner closest to where the wranglers work the bait. Since underwater photography is best up-close, you need to be where the action happens. Given the one-hour cage rotations and the necessity to work out an internal democracy for where you may be within the cage, there

will be limited opportunity to shoot from the ultimate sweet spot.

THE UGLY: If the seas get rough, the ride to Guadalupe can be a challenge. Rarely, a layer of mung will sweep off the island, as if to remind divers that elephant seals are pooping not far away. Typically it passes the cages quickly, but if the white shark action is peaking at that time, even temporarily reduced water clarity is a bummer.

South Australia

Trip Log: Just a half hour after we dropped hook at South Neptune Island, we not only had a shark, but a shark with an attitude. He came right up to the swim platform and started chomping on the aluminum for no apparent reason. I did some polecam work and was able to put the port within inches of the shark's jaws. I guess I could have done that with my housed camera as well, but I had a feeling that lying on the platform with my eye to the viewfinder would not be a prudent move with that particular shark at that particular time. A little later, when we saw a shark launch itself two-thirds of the way out of the water, my cautions were reaffirmed. These were not docile pets, but fierce predators deserving real respect. This day, we had five different sharks. With the shark-shooter galaxy in alignment (cage, bait, shark, wrangler, clear water, calm seas, plenty of film and digital capacity), I was in white shark heaven.

Made famous in the cinema classic *Blue Water, White Death*, South Australia is where sport diving for white sharks all began. Marketed as an expensive, exclusive photo opportunity in the early '80s, for years this was the only place in the world where sport divers could count on safe and consistent proximity to great white sharks. Just a decade later, overfishing made encounters rare. But since 1997, fishing for great white sharks has been banned in South Australia, and the sharks are back in a big way.

White shark trips start with a flight to Adelaide, and then a connection to Port Lincoln in South Australia. From there, it's about a four-hour boat ride (depending on boat speed) to the Neptune Islands. This is the great Southern Ocean, and the wind can rage, so the best time to be there is probably February through April, though the sharks are there all year long and the boats operate throughout the year.

Having been skunked here before, I was skeptical of my chances this year, but I was amazed at the consistency and quality of the shark encounters. On the very first day we had five sharks, and had three to seven sharks around the cage for the next three days in a row. These were aggressive sharks that weren't put off by the sound of our bubbles or noise from the cage. They wanted the bait and weren't shy about following it to the back of the boat, trying any strategy they could devise to outsmart the wrangler. These sharks hit the bait from under water, and they'd breach out of the water in pursuit. SD

MORE INFO > Each destination is significantly different in terms of how operators access the great whites, optimal season, and the types of photo opportunities that are available. To see a more in-depth view of all three destinations, visit www.scubadiving.com/frinksharks.

the scoop

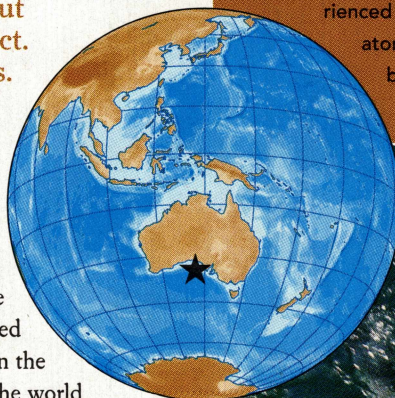
CONDITIONS: Water clarity ranges from 50 to 90 feet, and water temperatures are generally in the mid-60s during the Southern Hemisphere's summer. There may be even more sharks around the Neptunes July through October, but the water is colder and seas potentially rougher.

THE GOOD: Terrific shark action and at most only two boats on location. Very experienced white shark operators, and a short boat ride to the location. There

are excellent opportunities to photograph Australian sea lions under water at Hopkins Island as well, either on the way to or from the Neptunes.

THE BAD: The weather can be a factor most any time of year. There is potential for overcast days and conditions rough enough to make it uncomfortable in the shark cage.

THE UGLY: It's a long way to travel for North American divers, but all three of these shark destinations are distant in terms of elapsed time from home to shark cage.



A close encounter with a great white is like no other thrill in diving. Of course a sturdy shark cage is a nice thing to have when it happens.



A high-angle aerial photograph of a black helicopter with white rotor blades flying over a dense, green tropical forest. A prominent waterfall cascades down a rocky cliff face in the upper left portion of the frame. The helicopter is positioned in the lower half of the image, moving towards the left. The forest is thick with various shades of green, indicating a healthy jungle environment.

Waterfalls dot
the lush jungle on
Maui's north shore,
much of which is
accessible only by
helicopter.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
DAVID FLEETHAM

Log

H a w a i i

NOT LONG AGO, in a fiery volcanic outburst, molten rock spewed up from the seafloor, creating a remote archipelago in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. (Not long ago, that is, if you're a geologist.) Forty million years later, the islands that comprise Hawaii represent only the most recently formed peaks of a submerged mountain range that extends for some 1,600 miles. In fact, the Big Island, at the southern end of the state, is still in the process of island-making: Lava has been flowing from its Kilauea volcano since 1983, reaching the ocean in a spectacle of steam and splattering rock.

Hawaii is justifiably famous for its waterborne action—surfing, outrigger racing, sportfishing—but for divers there's nothing like the eye-popping diversity beneath the surface. Caverns and lava tubes are common sights, and a small dive light is recommended even for day dives to explore the many creature-filled recesses in the reef. Hard corals pepper the convoluted volcanic seafloor, serving as a gorgeous backdrop for Hawaii's colorful array of fish life.

(A VISUAL TOUR
ABOVE AND BELOW)

SINCE EACH OF HAWAII'S principal islands offers a distinctive diving experience, it's easy to see why divers return year after year. Kauai is the oldest of the lot and has several sites with huge table corals. Oahu offers shark dives on its north shore and wrecks to the west and south (Maui and the Big Island are also working to add wrecks in the near future). From Maui, divers can hop over to the breathtaking lava dome known as the Cathedrals, off the island of Lanai, or to a rocky islet off Molokai where hammerheads are sometimes seen. Measured from the ocean floor, the Big Island boasts the world's tallest mountain, so, for a truly unforgettable experience, try an open-ocean night drift dive over its dramatically contoured drop-off.



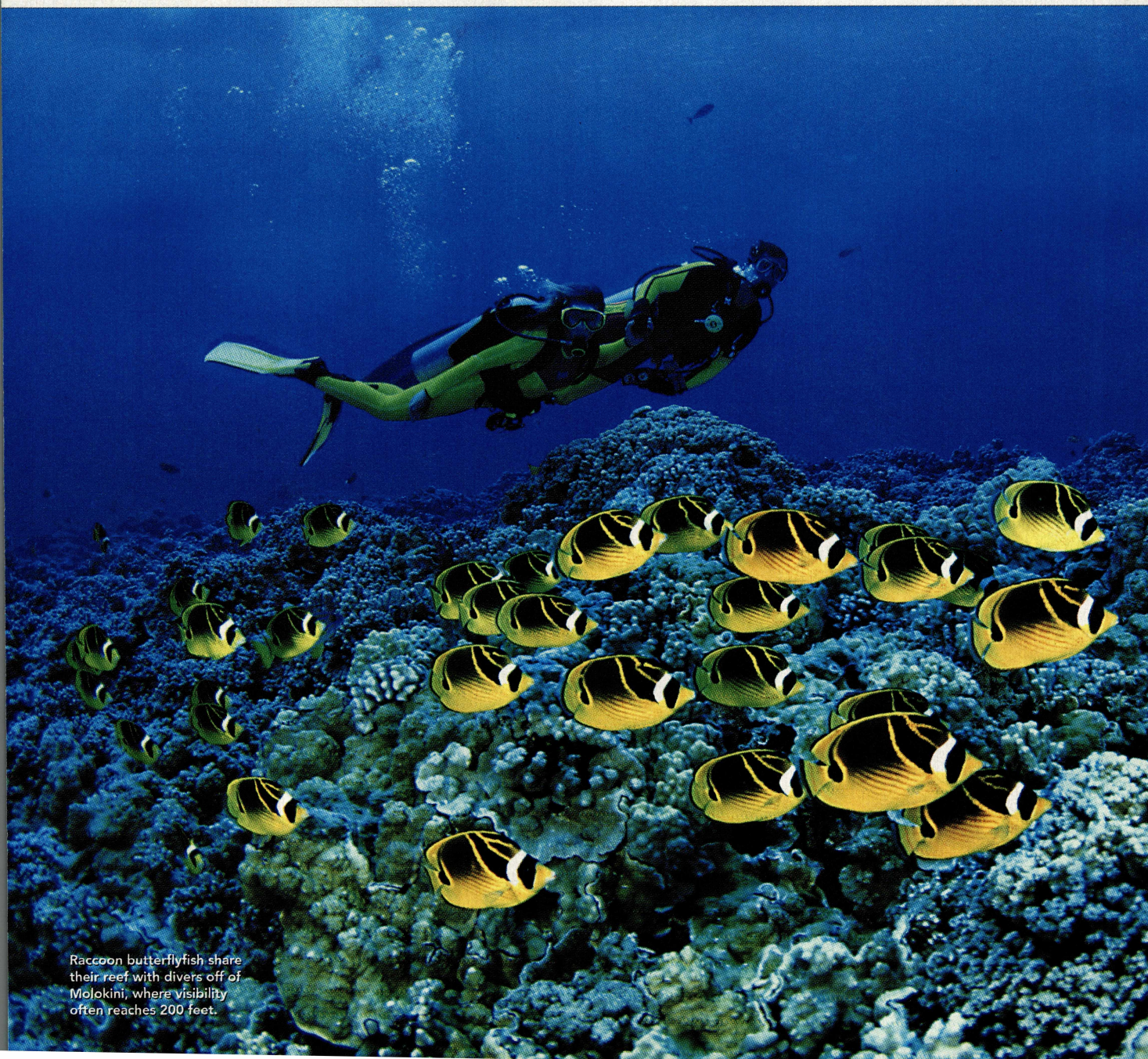
Thanks to years of protected status, Hawaii's green sea turtles are plentiful—and often oblivious to divers. Above: Hundreds of humpback whales migrate to the Hawaiian Islands each winter.





Pennantfish and pyramid butterflyfish swim past a vivid tableau of slate pencil sea urchins.

HAWAII WILL ALWAYS EVOKE IMAGES OF CRYSTAL-BLUE WATER and strikingly colored fish, but for those who look deeper, it's a unique and exclusive microcosm, a world unto itself. In fact, the most intriguing statistic about marine life in Hawaii is that up to 30 percent of the 650 species of fish here are found nowhere else on earth. To this day, new fish are still being discovered, a phenomenon that's directly due to the islands' geographic isolation. Since it can be a challenge for certain fish in these waters to find a partner within their own species, they are forced to produce hybrids, which often go on to establish themselves in significant numbers. Many invertebrates, algae and corals are also unique to Hawaii; even a few marine mammals are represented on the list of the state's endemic inhabitants. One of these, the critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal, can periodically be observed in the waters around the main islands.



Raccoon butterflyfish share their reef with divers off of Molokini, where visibility often reaches 200 feet.



Hang gliding over the beaches of south Maui. Below: The legendary waves at Peahi (known to long-boarders as Jaws) on Maui's north shore draw surfers from around the world.



WHEN IT COMES TO OFF-GASSING in the Aloha State, the choices are endless: You can turn your surface interval into a high-octane adventure or simply kick back with a frosty drink. For the intrepid, there's hang gliding over the heavenly beach at Hana or surfing the world-renowned 40-foot waves at Peahi, both on Maui. For the really hardcore, hit the Big Island for the original Ironman triathlon. The urban animal can enjoy the nonstop nightlife and five-star restaurants on Oahu's Waikiki Beach, while sightseers can take a helicopter tour through Kauai's version of the Grand Canyon, an eroded lava landscape that begins in dense jungle and winds down to the sea. Of course, there's nothing wrong with a little down time, and you could do a lot worse than to spend an afternoon slumbering on sun-warmed sand with just the sound of the surf for entertainment. **SD**

GET THERE > For more information about Hawaii, turn to In Depth, page 96, section 2.

CRUNCH

the NUMBERS

The results are in on
11 new recreational dive computers
tested and reviewed
by ScubaLab.

SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ORCA EDGE back in the early 1980s, dive computers have changed the face of diving. Few serious divers go in the water without one, and why should they? By continually calculating your no-decompression status during a dive, dive computers allow you more bottom time than do dive tables. They also monitor your ascent rate, record information on your dive and help you get out of unplanned decompression obligations—all functions that help you dive safer.

To review this year's crop of new computers, we first ran them through a three-dive profile at the USC hyperbaric chamber on Catalina Island, Calif. There we gathered data on each computer's relative liberalism or conservatism (see page 77) and found some surprising differences in how they compute no-deco limits.

Of course, how a computer goes about giving you information is also important. For the ergonomic evaluation, we put them in the hands of our seasoned team of test divers during a week of rigorous diving. Their mission: evaluate how well these computers provide and present critical dive data. Again, there are some surprising differences, and you'll find the divers' comments in the following reviews.



ING



BY JOHN BRUMM
photography by Paul Nurnberg

DIVE COMPUTERS IN REVIEW

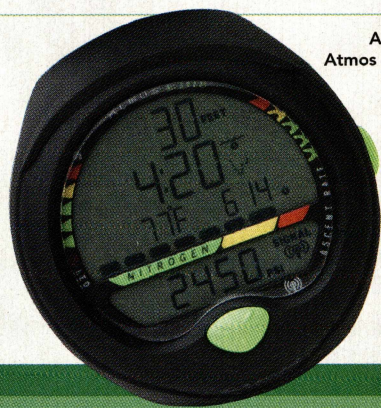
PRESENTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER, BY MANUFACTURER.

AERIS Atmos Elite The newest member of the Aeris family of dive computers is the air-integrated Atmos Elite. It uses a remote transmitter that screws into your reg's first stage, eliminating the need for a high-pressure hose. The Atmos Elite reads tank pressure to 5,000 psi in five-psi increments.

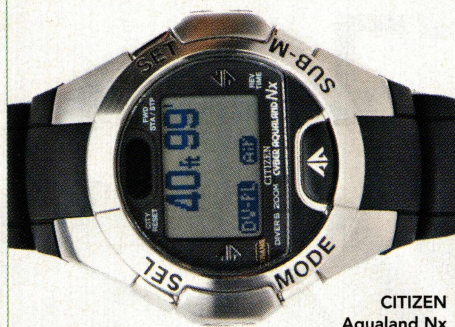
The low-profile wrist-mounted display provides a large face with good-sized primary data digits and smaller but still easy-to-read secondary data digits. The computer uses lots of graphics and makes generous use of green-yellow-red bars for nitrogen loading, oxygen loading and ascent rates.

The Atmos Elite uses a relatively liberal algorithm that allows more bottom time than many other computers. You can't program it to be more conservative, but backing off a few diamonds on the three-color nitrogen loading bar is an effective way to create your own safety cushion.

Overall, test divers loved the Atmos Elite, giving it thumbs up for its ability to provide easy-to-read data at depth. One diver praised the Elite for its "logical arrangement of data and practical logging capabilities." It comes with a padded storage box, and its software is upgradeable, so any future changes in algorithms can be downloaded through the computer's external calibration port.



AERIS
Atmos Elite



CITIZEN
Aqualand Nx

CITIZEN Aqualand Nx The Aqualand Nx is a combination digital wristwatch and dive computer. As a computer, test divers described the Aqualand Nx as easy to use, even for neophytes, with "straightforward functions." It's the only rechargeable computer of this group. We found the charge lasts only a few days, but it's easy to top off the batteries in a couple hours.

In spite of its very small screen—it's a watch, after all—Citizen did a good job of providing bold data digits within a limited space. Of course, they could have eliminated a few of the more obvious graphics. "You don't need a scuba diver icon to tell you you're under water," reported one of our test divers.

Other testers weren't happy about the Aqualand's lack of a practical backlight, and the fact that in nitrox mode it automatically resets the fo_2 setting to a default of 50 percent just 30 minutes after the last dive. Still, this snappy computer earned unanimous attaboys for a lot of technology loaded into a compact package.

This computer uses a DCIEM algorithm, which in our tests was conservative at maximum depths, but liberal on ascents. The Aqualand Nx comes with a hard carrying case, a charger and software.

DACOR Darwin Air The Dacor Darwin Air is a console computer that in many ways is one of the simplest, most user-friendly com-

puters in this group. It runs on two AAA batteries that are falling-down simple to replace, it has the bar-none best backlight going (you can activate it for 15 seconds or keep it on full-time). The screen uses multicolor prompts and a labeling system that makes it super simple to tell what mode you're in. There are also a couple of LED lights and audible alarms to help keep you focused on the tasks at hand.

But when you include both the main screen and the tank pressure screen (which reads to 5,150 psi in 10-psi increments) you can find yourself with a bunch of numbers to deal with. Most of them are labeled, but the labels are tiny and can be hard to see at depth.

Consequently, the Darwin Air generated the



DACOR
Darwin Air

STANDARD FEATURES

Important convenience features once so elusive in dive computers can now be found on virtually every model in this group. For example:

> **WATER ACTIVATION.** All

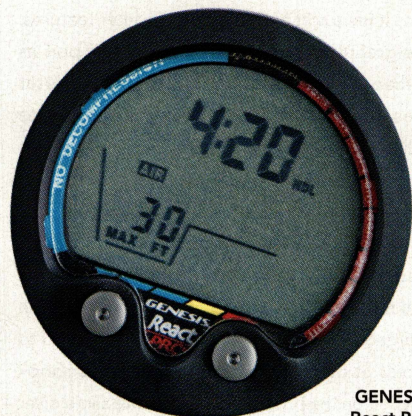
of these computers will turn themselves on upon hitting the water.

> **REPLACEABLE BATTERIES.** The lithium batteries used in most of today's computers cost just a few bucks apiece, can be found in most electronics stores and are relatively easy to change. Dacor and

Mares make it even easier—their computers use AAA batteries you can buy with your spare change, and their watertight compartments are super simple to access, allowing you to switch out batteries virtually in seconds. > **VARIABLE ASCENT ALARMS.** All but

the Citizen Aqualand Nx allow for faster ascents at greater depths (60 feet per minute in depths greater than 60 feet), then slow you down as you reach shallower depths (30 feet per minute in depths shallower than 60 feet). The Aqualand Nx allows a uniform rate of 60 feet per minute.

most polarizing reactions from test divers. On the plus side were comments like, "The numbers are not large, but they're nicely organized and readable"; "very comprehensive post dive info"; and "the visual warning lights are a big plus." On the negative side, divers complained about too many numbers creating a confusing screen. As one diver put it, "I look at this display and think, 'where the heck am I?' I've got nine num-



GENESIS
React Pro

bers to deal with here." Another diver commented: "I can't tell which number is which. How deep am I? Is it the large number or the teensy number? I can't tell."

The Darwin Air uses a variation of the RGBM algorithm. While this is the most conservative algorithm in this test group, divers who like an even greater safety margin can program in additional conservatism by adjusting the altitude setting. This computer also features a disconnect fitting so you can detach it from the high-pressure hose and take it with you.

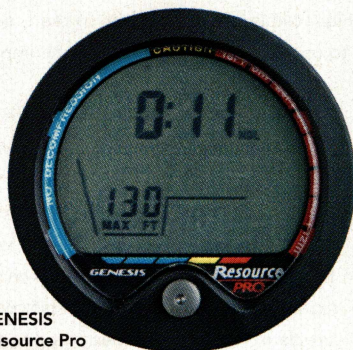
GENESIS React Pro This simple dive computer can be mounted in a console, strapped to your wrist or attached to a retractor. Its green-

yellow-red color bars are a bit hard to see at depth, but its display is very intuitive, and there are three data screens in dive mode. The main screen provides dive time remaining and current depth, the first alternate screen gives you bottom time, max depth and some oxygen data if you're diving nitrox, and the second alternate screen shows water temp, time of day and a bit more nitrox data, if applicable.

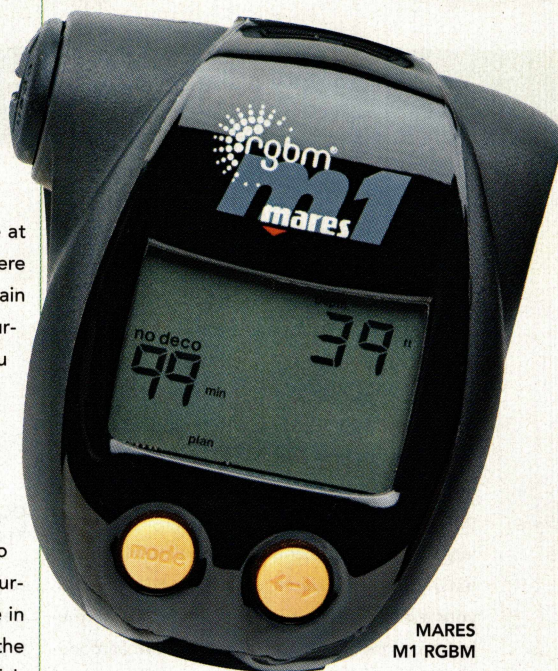
The upside to splitting up data like this is that each screen is uncluttered and easy to read. On the downside, you might find yourself switching screens more than you'd like in order to access basic dive data. In spite of the screen shuffle, test divers felt it was easy to follow the data trail.

Test divers also liked the audible ascent alarm and deemed the React Pro easy for planning and checking logs. However, a number of divers felt the plastic screen guard made the computer difficult to read on the surface after the dive. This guard is easy to remove.

GENESIS Resource Pro If you like to shop price, if you don't dive nitrox or if you aren't so familiar with computers, take a look at the Genesis Resource Pro. Eschewing such frills as audible alarms, nitrox capability and a



GENESIS
Resource Pro



MARES
M1 RGBM

PC interface, this one-button-activated computer offers solid computing in a simple package that incorporates intuitive green-yellow-red bars to monitor no-decompression limits (NDLs) and ascent rates as well as helpful graphics. In dive mode there are two screens: the main screen shows NDLs and current depth; push the button and you get bottom time and max depth.

The Resource Pro earned very good comments for ease of accessing data at depth. Said one test diver, "I loved this computer. It was very simple to use and I loved the diagram for max depth. It easily gave me the info that was most important to me through the entire dive." Another test diver concurred: "This computer is easy to use and easy to read. I like its simplicity."

The only complaint leveled against the Resource Pro had to do with its continual scrolling in surface mode, which can be annoying when you're trying to get back to the main screen.

MARES M1 RGBM Like the Dacor Darwin Air, the Euro-style Mares M1 RGBM is good-looking and user-friendly, from its simple battery loading arrangement to a superior back-

> BACKLIGHTS. All these dive computers except the Aqualand Nx provide some way to illuminate the data screen at night, although some are easier to use and more efficient than others. The Citizen's light function is designed to enhance daylight viewing, only.

> NITROX CAPABILITIES. All but the entry-level Genesis Resource are capable of calculating nitrox mixes up to 50 percent. The Tusa IQ-700 Hunter calculates nitrox mixes to 99 percent. **> AUDIBLE ALARMS.** All but the Genesis Resource and Sherwood Profile pro-

vide disarmable audible alarms. All of these computers also have some sort of visual alarms, from LED lights to blinking bar diamonds and flashing data digits. **> PC CONNECTIVITY.** All but the Genesis Resource and Suunto Gekko offer the ability to download dive data to

your personal computer. The Gekko does, however, have a PC port that allows dive shops to zero out the computer between rentals. **> DATE/TIME AND TEMPERATURE.** All of these computers provide water temperature. All also offer date, time or both.

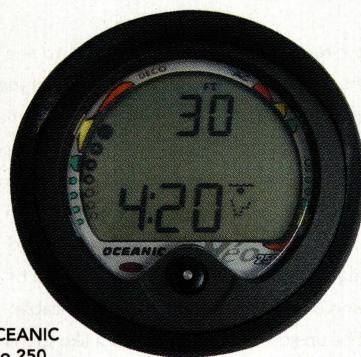
DIVE COMPUTERS IN REVIEW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73.

light system that allows you to see the light either for 15-second intervals or the entire time, your choice. It also uses a brand-new RGBM algorithm that provides for a deeper safety stop ceiling than other dive computers, and allows you to easily program in additional levels of conservatism via two large control buttons.

But also like the Darwin, the Mares takes some getting used to. Though it has a relatively simple screen with readable data digits, the words labeling each number are minuscule and can virtually disappear at depth, depending on how good your eyes are. Also, the words and icons on the bottom of the screen that let you know what mode you're in are tiny. Consequently, test divers found it took a couple of dives to get accustomed to the presentation. The owner's manual is fairly large and written in six languages.

OCEANIC VT Pro The VT Pro is Oceanic's newest "hoseless" version of an air-integrated dive computer. With its low-profile wrist display and large screen, this easy-to-use computer was a favorite among test divers. It offers five screens in the dive mode. Green-yellow-



OCEANIC Veo 250

red color bars let you easily monitor your nitrogen loading and ascent rates, as well as oxygen loading if you're diving nitrox. What's more, it offers an additional "air time remaining" color bar that provides a graphic representation of how much time you can remain at your present depth and then, following a safe ascent, surface with a pre-determined reserve of air.

Using the most liberal of the algorithms, the VT Pro has a programmable audible alarm that sounds when you reach a pre-determined point on the nitrogen loading color bar. This makes an easy system of providing a safety cushion that much easier. Said one test diver, "I really like the idea of having an air-integrated computer worn on the wrist, so all critical info—including air pressure—is in one place." Another test diver was partial to the choice of screens in dive mode: "I loved this computer. Easy to read, easy to use, lots of good data, and the important info is readily available."

Most of our test divers had no problems with data transmission via the wireless transmitter, regardless of where they positioned the wrist unit. However, one diver who likes to cruise the reefs with his arms folded tightly under his chest, reported that he occasionally lost tank pressure data. When he unfolded his arms, the unit re-acquired the signal relatively quickly.

The VT Pro reads tank pressure to 5,000 psi in five-psi increments. It comes with a padded storage box.

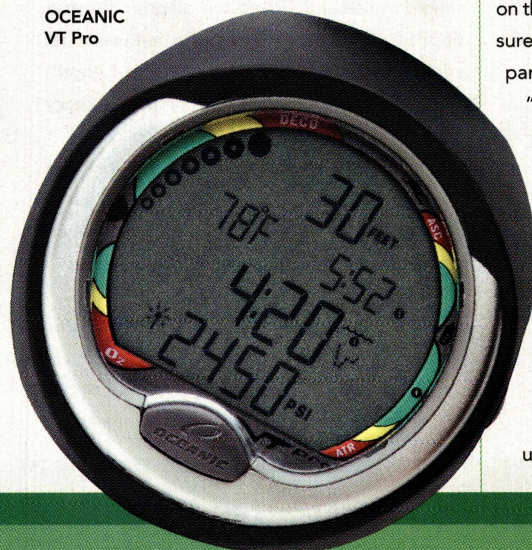
OCEANIC Veo 250 The Veo 250 has been around for a while in Australia, Japan and Europe, but is only now being sold in the U.S. It's similar in shape and size to the VT Pro, providing a low profile on the wrist, and it uses the same algorithm, but it isn't air-integrated, nor does it have some of the VT Pro's other features. The green-yellow-red color bars don't pop as well as the VT Pro's either. But the computer does reflect Oceanic's smart use of graphics as well as its penchant for large uncluttered screens with big bold data digits that are easy to read under water.

Overall, test divers liked the performance and presentation of data of the Veo 250 via its four dive mode screens. Commented one diver, "The alternate screens are easy to understand and to access at depth, and I like the simple logbook function on the surface." However, this same diver found the clear plastic screen protector "a bit hard to see through right after you get out of the water." These protectors snap onto the screen face and are easy to remove. Another test diver found it very easy to program in personal preferences: "It's very intuitive. Button controls are easy to use, putting all relevant data right at hand."

SHERWOOD Profile Sherwood's Profile is a keep-it-simple dive computer incorporating a single push-button control, green-yellow-red bar graphs and good-sized numbers set in an orderly display. While universally lauded as an efficient, easy-to-use dive computer, this simplicity appealed to only half the test divers—in particular, those who aren't that familiar with computers.

The Profile has an owner's manual that is sim-

OCEANIC VT Pro



THE DIFFERENCES

It's the details that differentiate these computers from each other. For example:

> DATA DISPLAYS. How a

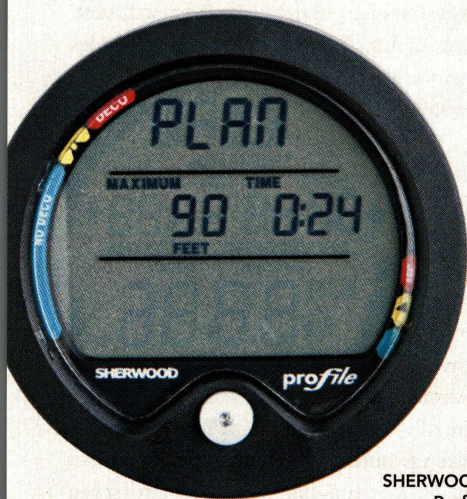
computer presents its diving information can make a big difference. Some computers display the most critical data (like NDLs and depth) with the largest digits, followed by the less critical data (like temperature and time) with smaller digits.

Other computers use similar sized digits for all data, and on others there seems to be no correlation between the importance of data and the size of digits. **> ALGORITHMS.** A computer's algorithm determines its liberal or conservative

leanings (see sidebar, page 76). Conservative algorithms limit the amount of time you can spend at depth without putting the computer into deco mode, but increase your safety margin. Liberal algorithms allow more bottom time before

ple and straightforward and easy even for the neophyte computer user to understand. The computer itself was described as "very functional." One test diver, who prefers simplicity, added, "This is a very readable computer. I found it very easy to understand, even on the first dive."

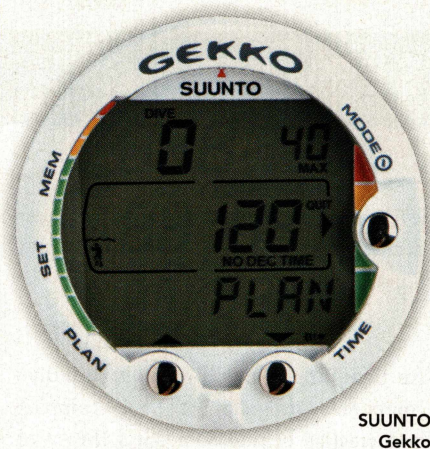
But the more computer-savvy divers felt that while the Profile performed well as a basic computer, it was just too limiting for their tastes. Said one such diver, "This is a simple, easy-to-use com-



SHERWOOD
Profile

puter, but the one-button control is just not enough." Preferring a computer with more programming capability, he added, "For me, this would be a really good backup computer."

SUUNTO Gekko The Gekko is based on Suunto's popular Vyper and Cobra dive computers, without a number of their features and at a much lower price. What you get with the Gekko is a wafer-thin, well-laid-out display with big bold numbers, helpful graphics and green-yellow-red color bars to simplify data monitoring. What you don't get is a PC interface or an electronic back-



SUUNTO
Gekko

light function. To provide illumination you can charge the computer's phosphorescent LCD display by shining a dive light on it.

Contributing to what test divers considered to be an excellent data screen both on the surface and at depth, the Gekko lets you know exactly what mode you're in by plainly telling you—"history," "memory," "nitrox," etc. appear prominently in the lower corner of the screen, a huge convenience. Grouping similar functions into a single section also simplifies the menu system, creating a more intuitive computer requiring fewer button pushes to get where you want to go.

This is the most programmable computer of the group, allowing you to adjust for three altitude ranges as well as three personal preference ranges. This will make a computer that already leans toward the conservative even more so.

As one test diver commented, "This is a great, safe, easy-to-understand computer. Simple for the beginner, but with all the features that a pro might need." Another diver added, "An outstanding computer, simply no complaints—except for the lack of a backlight."

TUSA IQ-700 Hunter Tusa's IQ-700 Hunter is another computer that uses a well-designed display with "dive," "plan," "log" and other prompts to let you know what screen you're working in. The computer has a large center mode button flanked by smaller buttons that make it easy to navigate through the system.

The computer uses green-yellow-red bar graphs, but they are very narrow and difficult to see, especially at depth. Data digits are good-sized and easy to read. A safety factor adjustment allows you to program an additional level of conservatism into your dive.

Overall, test divers liked the Hunter. It garnered positive comments for ease of accessing and reading screens both on the surface and at depth. As one diver said, "It's easy to get the info you need at depth—also easy to read after-dive data. Plus, the manual is easy to follow." Other test divers liked the alarm that sounds as you're about to hit the red NDL zone. However, most test divers griped about having to hold down the button to view the alternate screen. Echoing the sentiments of others, one diver said, "I'd rather just hit the button once and let it go."



TUSA
IQ-700 Hunter

going into deco mode, leaving it to the diver to factor in a DCS cushion.

> AIR INTEGRATION. Some of these computers provide tank pressure data, using either a console design that connects to a high-pressure hose, or a "wireless" or "hose-

less" system that uses a transmitter screwed into your first stage.

> DATA AND/OR SCREEN ACCESS. Depending on computer, you have from one to four buttons with which to access data, program preferences or switch

screens. In most cases, the more buttons a computer has, the easier it is to use. **> COLOR HIGH-LIGHTS AND/OR GRAPHICS.** Nitrogen-loading and ascent rate bars using green, yellow, red color schemes make information

much easier to read and understand. Graphics also draw attention to critical data, and word or icon prompts allow you to immediately discern what mode you're in.

LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE?

HOW YOUR COMPUTER'S ALGORITHM AFFECTS YOUR BOTTOM TIME BY JOHN FRANCIS

OUR DIVE COMPUTER TESTS don't stop with the size of the buttons and the readability of the displays. We also test the information they give you about your no-decompression limits (NDLs) because computers can differ significantly on the exact same profile.

To test these differences, we put all 11 dive computers in the USC Hyperbaric Chamber on Catalina Island and ran them simultaneously on a three-dive profile designed to represent a typical day of multi-level dives within recreational limits.

The first dive, for 51 minutes, went to a maximum depth of 100 feet. After a one-hour surface interval we made a second dive of 44 minutes to a max depth of 70 feet. An hour-and-a-half surface interval followed before the third dive, 41 minutes to a max depth of 60 feet. Just to make it interesting, the second dive included a reverse profile—five minutes at 40 feet, four minutes at 60 feet, then five minutes at the max depth for 70 feet. On the ascent we had our “divers” spend six minutes at 60 feet and seven minutes at 40. Ascent rates did not exceed 30 feet per minute.

Our liberal-vs.-conservative charts note the minutes of no-deco time each computer allowed at specific moments in each dive. These differences are the result of the algorithms used to calculate NDLs.

Are the most liberal computers reckless? Are the most conservative paranoid? There's no way to be sure, given the theoretical nature of decompression and individual factors such as fitness, cold, exertion

levels and hydration. Ultimately, you must decide what constitutes a safe profile and build in safety margins.

ALGORITHM SOUP

An algorithm, in this context, is your dive computer's program. It's the complex mathematics behind someone's theory of how decompression works. The computers in this review use four base algorithms—usually tweaked and modified to varying degrees by manufacturers—based on four different theories of how a diver absorbs and eliminates inert gases.

THE BASE ALGORITHM: Haldanean

Based on the work of J.S. Haldane, the pioneer of decompression theory, these algorithms have been modified numerous times over the years and remain the most widely used in diving. Haldane's theory grouped the body's thousands of different tissues into theoretical tissue compartments, each with a different rate for absorbing and releasing inert gas. He also believed that gas was always released at the same rate at which it was absorbed. The theory does not account for the presence of tiny “silent bubbles” formed during ascent that can slow off-gassing, so Haldanean algorithms, unless specifically modified, tend to be very liberal in adding no-decompression time during ascents.

The Computers: Aeris Atmos Elite, Genesis React Pro, Genesis Resource Pro, Oceanic VT Pro, Oceanic Veo 250, Sherwood Profile.

The Results: In our tests, these six com-

puters allowed the most consistently liberal no-deco times from start to finish and consistently added no-decompression time during ascents—even after the reverse profile.

THE BASE ALGORITHM: DCIEM

Developed by the Canadian Defense and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine (DCIEM), this algorithm is unusual because it assumes only four tissue compartments and because it assumes that dissolved gas passes from your blood to your fastest tissue, and from it to the next fastest, and so on. Haldane and other theories assume gas passes from blood to each compartment directly.

The Computer: Citizen Aqualand Nx.

The Result: During our chamber dives, the Citizen was very conservative at maximum depths, but also very liberal during the later portions of ascents, sometimes even more liberal than Haldanean computers. On ascent from the reverse profile in Dive 2, it went from the most conservative computer to the most liberal. The Citizen initially subtracted no-deco time (from seven minutes at 70 feet, to three minutes at the 60-foot sampling point), but after seven minutes at 40 feet it was displaying a generous 66 minutes of no-deco time.

THE BASE ALGORITHM: Buhlmann

Swiss researcher Albert Buhlmann added to the Haldanean model the idea behind “M values” developed by Robert Workman. These values represent the theoretical amount of overpressure that tissues can tolerate without forming bubbles. Buhlmann also gave more attention to slower tissues.

FASHIONABLY LATE



Here's a first look at three new computers unavailable during our tests but now hitting the U.S. market. Look for full reports in a future issue.

> MARES NEMO This stylish, Euro-designed dive computer/wristwatch combo is available in a brushed stainless-steel

or titanium casing with a composite rubber wristband. It uses Mares' new RGBM algorithm and it's suited for both air and nitrox mixes.



> OCEANIC ATOM 1.0 Oceanic's first wristwatch/computer combo is air-integrated, offers eight different screens and can be programmed for up to three nitrox mixes. OceanLog PC software lets you download dives and upload settings.

> TUSA IQ-800

The sleek IQ-800 DC-Sapience generates a lot of buzz, thanks to its uncluttered layout and unique vibration warning function, similar to what you'd find on a cellular phone.



CHARTING THE DIFFERENCES

AERIS Atmos Elite
GENESIS React Pro & Resource Pro
OCEANIC Vao 250 & VT Pro
SHERWOOD Profile

TUSA IQ-700 Hunter

MARES M1 RGBM

CITIZEN Aqualand Nx

SUUNTO Gekko

DACOR Darwin Air

The Computer: Tusa IQ-700 Hunter.

The Results: The Tusa consistently staked the middle ground between the most liberal and most conservative computers, but trended to the conservative side. On ascent from the reverse profile, it initially subtracted no-deco time (from 13 minutes at 70 feet to 10 minutes at 60 feet), but then tended to hold steady. On ascent from 40 feet, it added time, but not as rapidly as the Haldanean or DCIEM computers.

THE BASE ALGORITHM: RGBM

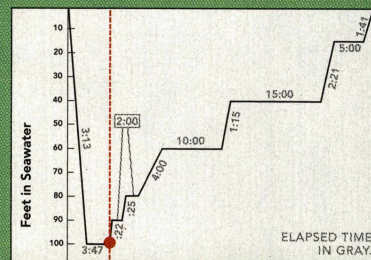
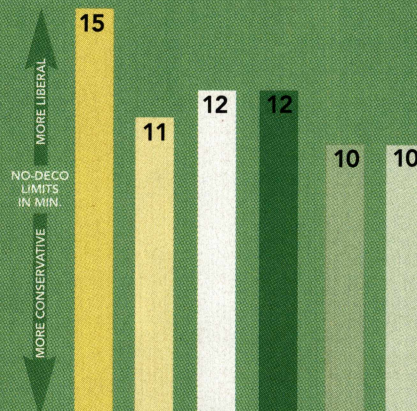
The Reduced Gradient Bubble Model (RGBM) algorithm was developed after Doppler bubble research showed that "silent bubbles" unknown to Haldane often form after a dive without causing DCS symptoms. On the theory that these bubbles would be slower than dissolved gas to leave your body, and could even interfere with the outflow of dissolved gas, the algorithm is consistently conservative.

The Computers: Dacor Darwin Air, Mares M1 RGBM, Suunto Gekko.

The Results: These computers started conservative, stayed that way longer during ascents and tended to go even more conservative in their initial response to the reverse profile. At our sample points on the ascent from Dive 2, they had subtracted no-deco time when some of the more liberal computers had added it. One RGBM computer even ran out of no-deco time after a seven-minute stay at 40 feet. Haldanean computers at the same moment allowed 57 minutes, the DCIEM computer 66 minutes. On ascent from 40 feet, they all began to add no-deco time. With an RGBM computer, particularly on a reverse profile, you cannot dive to the edge of the no-deco limits and then assume a modest ascent will buy you more time. SD

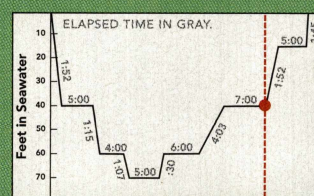
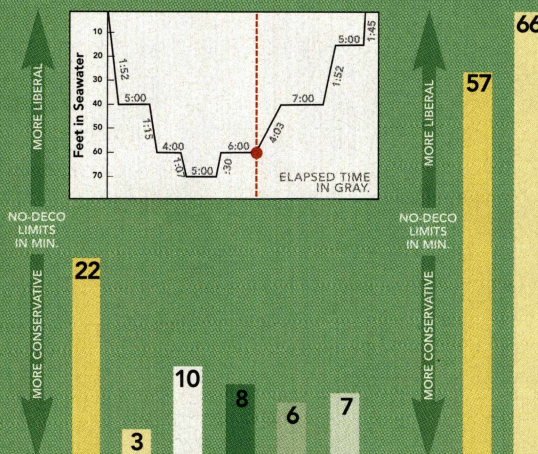
GET MORE > For more information on the dive computers reviewed in this issue, turn to In Depth, page 98, section 5.

DIVE ONE



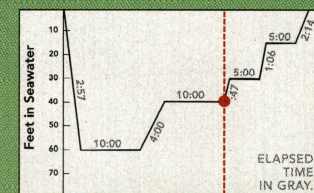
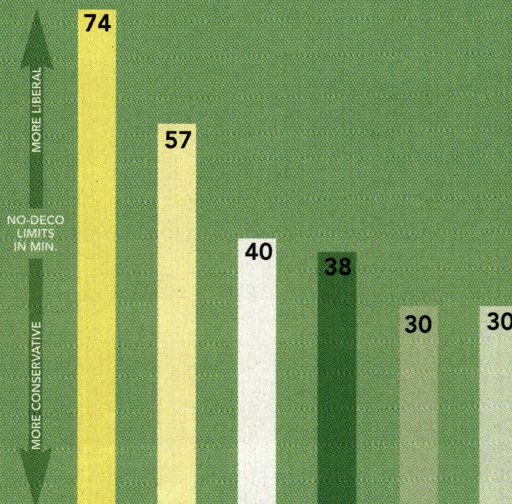
The bar graph at left shows the range of no-deco limits displayed by the tested computers at a sample point from dive one (marked on the profile, above). Even at the earliest stages of nitrogen loading, the computers are beginning to show marked differences.

DIVE TWO

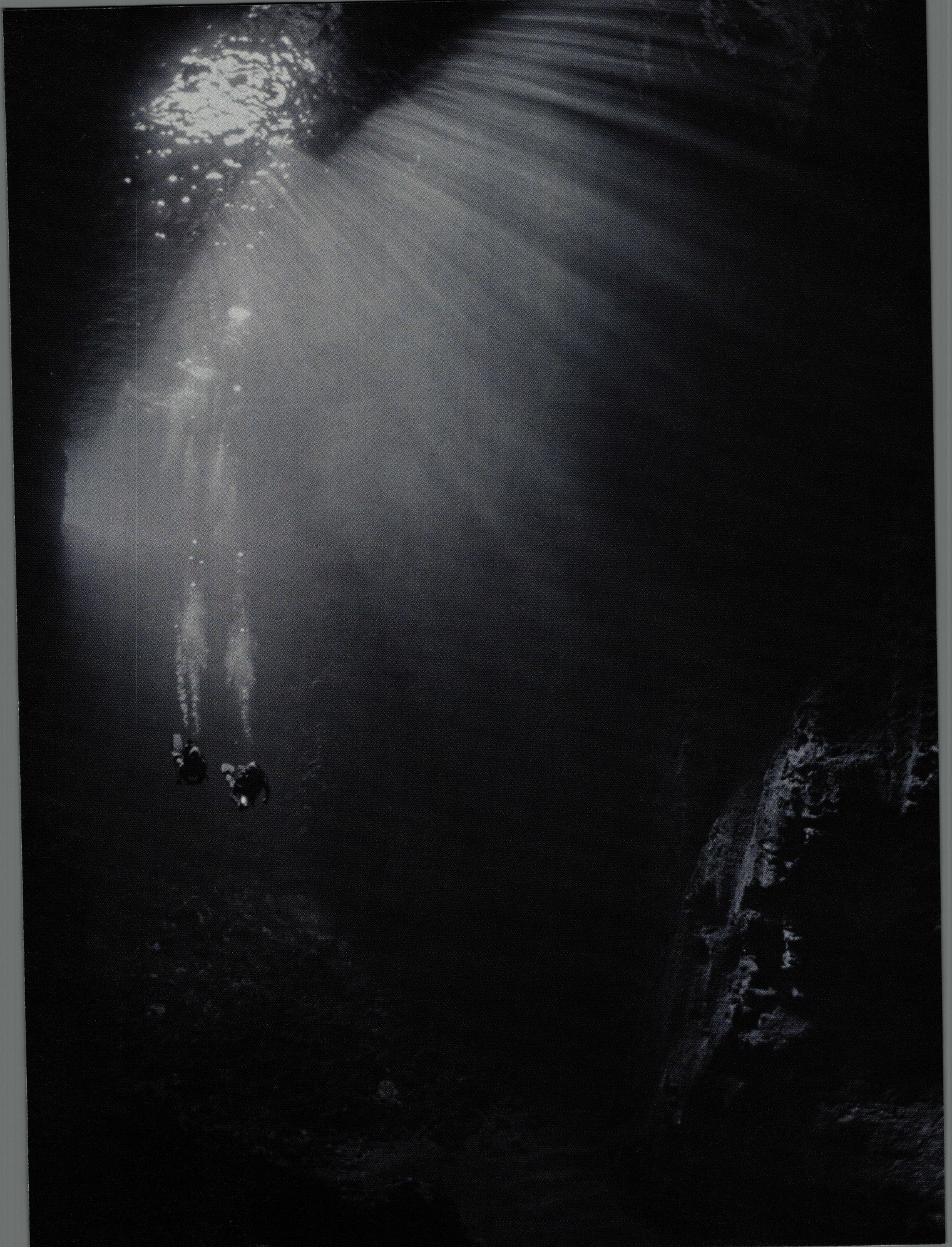


These two bar graphs represent no-deco limits displayed at two distinct points during the same dive. Ascending from the reverse profile, the Haldanean computers had consistently added no-deco time at both sample points. At 60 feet, the DCIEM computer had subtracted time to become the most conservative computer, but after seven minutes at 40 feet, it was the most liberal. The Buhlmann and one RGBM computer generally held steady, while the more conservative RGBM computers had subtracted time at 40 feet.

DIVE THREE



Toward the end of the dive day, this snapshot at 40 feet provides perhaps the best general overview of their liberal vs. conservative leanings. As all these graphs show, the differences between computers can be dramatic.



LESSONS FOR

Life

by Michael Ange

(DIVE ACCIDENTS, CLOSE CALLS
& HOW YOU CAN AVOID THEM)

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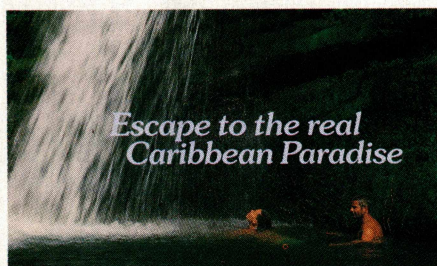
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(THIS IS A TRUE STORY,
BUT THE NAMES HAVE
BEEN CHANGED.)

TOO DEEP, TOO COLD, TOO SOON

Two beginners dive outside their comfort zone. One learns his lesson. One pays the price.

DONALD SURFACED SLOWLY with his dive group beneath the high rock wall of the quarry. As heads broke the water, a quick count showed he was missing two divers, Shawn and Tom, the newcomers. He'd planned for this. Navigating across the quarry in this murky water could be difficult. That's why he'd instructed all the divers to meet up at the surface before continuing the dive. He slowly scanned the surface of the quarry looking for bubbles, but as a few minutes became 10, his concern grew dramatically. Herding the rest of his group back across the quarry toward the safety of the beach, he began a frantic search for the missing divers.



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LESSONS FOR LIFE

THE DIVERS

Shawn and Tom were relatively new certified divers in their early 20s, in good physical condition and with better-than-average water skills for beginning divers. Both had completed eight dives including their open-water certification dives. Eager to build their skills, they joined a group of local divers for a fun dive in a local quarry. The dive would be headed by Donald, a recently certified divemaster.

THE DIVE

The divers met early on a Saturday morning at the quarry. It would be Shawn's and Tom's first freshwater dive, and they bundled themselves

surface on the other side for a pre-dive head count in case anyone became separated. Apparently, the two inexperienced divers became disoriented, lost sight of Donald and the group, and continued trying to reach the other wall.

Tom and Shawn lacked the navigational skills to follow the compass heading, and they ventured into the very deep portion of the quarry. They also failed to monitor their depth or maintain proper buoyancy. As they swam forward, they were also swimming deeper.

About halfway across, Shawn glanced at his gauge, noting with alarm that his depth was approaching 150 feet and that his air supply

Shawn glanced at his gauge, noting with alarm that his depth was approaching 150 feet and that his air supply was nearly gone.

in heavy wetsuits, gloves and hoods to ward off the chill of water temperatures in the mid-50s. The quarry was known locally as a dangerously deep hole with depths exceeding 250 feet in some locations. However, a roadbed that was cut into three of the rock walls offered the opportunity to make shallower dives. After some discussion, the divers all agreed to swim across the quarry to the opposite wall and descend to a portion of the roadbed in the 80-foot range.

THE ACCIDENT

Donald laid out a detailed plan. To avoid an awkward surface swim, the entire group would descend to a depth of about five or six feet and follow a set compass heading until they reached the opposite side of the quarry. The group was to stay together, but they also planned to

was nearly gone. Making a frantic turn, he also realized that Tom was nowhere to be found.

THE RESCUE AND RECOVERY

As the rest of the group searched the surface for bubbles, Shawn rocketed out of the water in a full state of panic. Donald quickly reached him and towed him back toward the beach. Even though Shawn was apparently uninjured, Donald had one of the more experienced divers assist him from the water. He barked out instructions to put Shawn on oxygen as a safety precaution and to monitor him closely. Donald then began frantically searching the surface for Tom's bubbles.

Unfortunately, his search was fruitless. Tom's body was later recovered from a depth of 180 feet.

All of his gear was in place and his tank had been exhausted.

ANALYSIS

Donald failed to set up a plan that would give him adequate control and supervision of the divers who trusted him. He also failed to consider that Shawn and Tom lacked the navigational skills necessary to comply with the dive plan at this early stage of their diving experience. In many respects, Shawn and Tom were model divers, and while it was admirable of them to want to practice and improve their skills, this particular dive presented too many new challenges for them to dive safely.

This was the first freshwater excursion for both of them, and the buoyancy challenges of adapting to the new environment were undoubtedly complicated by the bulk and unfamiliarity of the thick rental wetsuits, hoods and gloves required by the water temperatures. Once the divers were under water, the unfamiliar task of compass navigation in very difficult conditions required an intense focus that caused the divers to stray too deep and off course.

In short, the combined demands of the dive overwhelmed the new divers. Had they discussed their inexperience in these conditions with Donald before attempting to navigate the quarry, the dive might not have ended in disaster. Although they should have recognized their personal limitations, their lack of adequate training made it difficult for them to appreciate the complexity of the dive plan.

Shawn's uncontrolled ascent was obviously the result of a full-blown panic attack brought on by narcosis, his unfamiliarity with the



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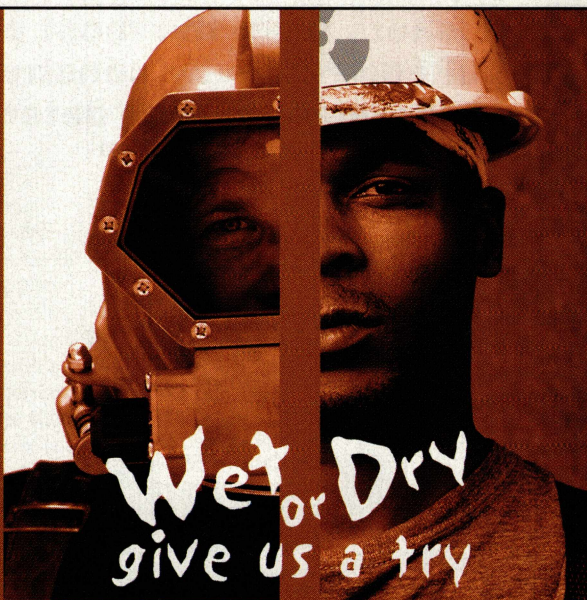
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LESSONS FOR LIFE

buoyancy characteristics of the heavy wetsuit, the cold water, the lack of visibility and his sudden awareness of both his extreme depth and rapidly dwindling gas supply. In spite of doing everything wrong, he escaped the incident without injury.

We can obviously never know exactly what happened to Tom, but the fact that his equipment was securely in place and that his tanks were completely empty makes it likely that he never panicked, but instead suffered from deep-water blackout, which led to his death. **SD**

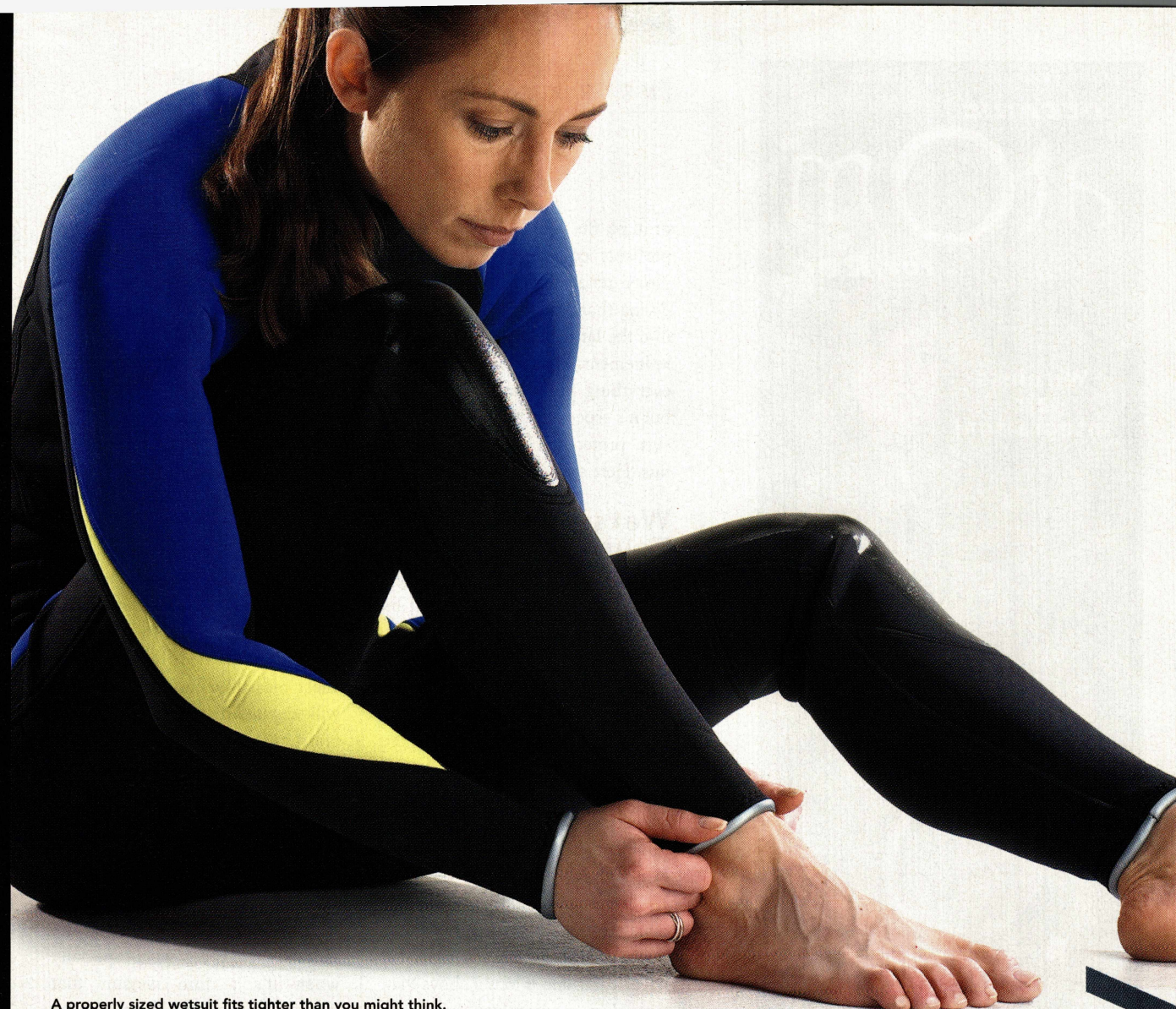
LESSONS FOR LIFE

1 KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS. Although you should heed the advice of professionals, you must understand and take responsibility for your own dive safety. Refuse to dive when the plan exceeds your capabilities.

2 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. Basic skills like navigation and buoyancy control are rarely mastered in entry-level training. Before exposing yourself to situations where these skills are critical, you should take additional courses or gain the experience necessary to master them.

3 WATCH YOUR GAUGES. Maintain a constant check of both depth and remaining gas pressure on every dive. These checks could have alerted Tom and Shawn to the danger they were in.

4 CONTROL YOUR ASCENT. Even with a dangerously low gas supply, divers should make every effort to control their ascent. Every foot you ascend makes more gas available, so the safest thing to do is maintain a controlled ascent.



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Get Fit, Dive Happy

You'll dive better and safer with properly fitting gear. Here's how. BY JOHN FRANCIS

SHOPPING FOR dive gear? Forget about features and performance. Well, don't completely forget about them. But in many cases, the trick features and the super-high performance that you hear so much about shouldn't be at the top of your shopping list. Fit comes first. How that new wetsuit, BC

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or mask fits your unique body will probably contribute more to your safety, relaxation and enjoyment of diving than whether you've bought into the latest, gotta-have technical refinement. Fit matters with almost everything you take under water, but it's especially critical with exposure protection, BCs, masks and fins. Here's what to look for.

Wetsuits: Your Second Skin

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, yet most difficult fitting job might be finding a wetsuit that fits you right. It's got to be snug all over, behind your knees and around your neck as well as across your chest. If it's not equally snug everywhere, the water inside will inevitably squirt from the tight areas to the loose areas. Once it's moving, it's likely to squirt out, carrying your body heat with it.

"It's basic hydraulics," says custom designer Jon Lent, of JMJ Wetsuits. "If the suit fits you tightly at the calf area and is looser above that, every time you move you create a lit-

tle vacuum pump that's pushing water around." Neck, wrist and ankle seals slow the water pumping but usually don't stop it.

Ideally, you would be dipped in rubber, the wetsuit equally snug all over. But how tight is "snug"? Probably tighter than you think. "If it's really comfortable, it's probably too big," says Lent.

In fact, tighter is better, up to a point. You've got to move and you've got to breathe, but not without some resistance if maximum warmth is your goal. Lent typically cuts the chest circumference two inches under the diver's relaxed chest measurement. A full breath will expand the chest two inches more, requiring the suit to stretch four inches around the chest. When you buy a stock wetsuit, you might look for a gap of about two inches when the front or back zipper is open.

Most of us buy our wetsuits "off the rack," in stock sizes that fit the average diver pretty well, especially when it's a thin wetsuit that stretches more. Size charts—those

GET FIT, PART II

WHILE NOT AS "FIT CRITICAL" as the rest of your gear, the ergonomics of regulators, tanks and even dive computers can also make a world of difference in your diving comfort, enjoyment and most important, safety.

Regulators. Mouthpieces can be changed or trimmed for smaller mouths. Regulator hoses should be just long enough to allow you a full range of movement without kinking or tugging at the second stage in your mouth.

Tanks. It's not rocket science. Smaller tanks fit smaller divers better. Those divers don't need all the air of the standard aluminum 80 to keep up with a larger buddy, and if they try to carry the tank by its valve with their arm extended, they'll drag it on the ground. But an aluminum 63, for example, is four inches shorter. It weighs four pounds less and is less buoyant when empty too.

Dive Computers. How small and close together are its buttons and how big are your fingers, especially in gloves? It's a ridiculous question only until you can't access those cool features you paid for. Try it before you buy.

that say if you're 5 feet, 11 inches, and 180 pounds you're an ML, for example—put you in the ballpark. But to get the best fit, you'll need to try on the suit and get the help of knowledgeable salespeople to help you judge where it's too tight and too loose.

There are two problem areas you should pay attention to. One is inseam length: how far the suit tucks up into your armpits and your groin. A high, tight fit there will be warmer, but may be uncomfortable, especially with thick neoprene. You have to decide how much discomfort you can tolerate for the sake of warmth. The other problem area is the neck seal. If the collar is at all loose, it will scoop in cold water as you swim forward. Check the seal while you turn your head, nod forward and look up.

Divers with unusual body shapes will get the best fit from a custom-made wetsuit. You can buy a custom suit through a dive shop or over the internet, but you'll need someone to help you take at least 20 measurements, both linear (elbow to wrist, shoulder tip to crotch, etc.) and circumference (neck, chest, thigh, etc.).

But there's a middle ground. Some manufacturers now offer tall and short variations of men's and women's shapes for a total of more than 20 fit possibilities. The more sizes you can choose from, the closer you'll come to your unique perfect fit. Another option is the "custom stock" wetsuit. At least one major wetsuit manufacturer, Henderson, will custom-build one of its standard models to your measurements. They also allow customers to mix and match sizes on combo suits and offer "hyperstretch" neoprene in thicknesses up to 7mm that can help with the comfort vs. cold trade-off.

Dry Suits: Avoid the Squeeze

A **PRECISE FIT** is less important with a dry suit than a wetsuit because there is supposed to be some room inside it. But not too much. A properly fitting dry suit has room for your underclothes and allows a full range of movement, but no more. A dry suit that's too baggy will create drag, and if you get too much air in it, that bubble has room to run around like a four-year-old on a sugar rush. Look for the smallest suit that accommodates your heaviest thermal undergarments and allows a full range of movement.

A couple of tips: Fit the underclothes before the suit. If they're too tight, your suit will feel restrictive. Too loose and you're more likely to have "suit squeeze" when a fold of extra material is pressed into your flesh. And don't forget room for insulating your feet when sizing boots.

Next, can you move freely in clothing plus dry suit? Shell suits don't stretch and need extra room. Touch your toes, reach behind your head as if opening a tank valve, lift a knee as if you're climbing a ladder, crouch into a ball.

Custom fitting latex seals causes the most anguish. They have to be trimmed with scissors, but by how much? Once they're cut, you can't go back, so most divers leave these seals too tight. Experienced dive store staff should be able to help, but a rule of thumb is that your flesh should not bulge over the top of your neck seal—fatter people excepted, says Dick Long of DUI. The neck seal should lie flat on your neck. It need only touch your skin, as water pressure will press it down to make the seal.

BCs: Size Matters

YOUR BC has to do more things well than any other piece of gear. It has to

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A good fit is a snug fit so that your BC and tank move with you like an extension of your body. When you add air to your BC on the surface, for example, it should lift your body, not float off you. Many makers offer five or six sizes, an indication of the importance they put on correct fit.

To pick the right size, go to the store with your exposure suit. Mount the BC to a tank and, wearing your suit, put it on. Start with the cummerbund, says Tom Phillip, manager of BC design at Aqua Lung. Leaving the shoulder straps loose for now, pull the cummerbund around your waist—above your hips and below your ribs. Pull the cummerbund

snug so the weight of the tank rests on your hips and close it. About four inches of hook-and-loop fastening should overlap, assuming that kind of closure. The length of the cummerbund can be adjusted or a different length cummerbund can be swapped if necessary.

If there's a chest strap, attach it now with its adjustment about in the middle. Next, take the slack out of the shoulder straps. Don't overtighten them, as you'll transfer the weight of the tank to your shoulders and pull the lobes of front-inflation-style BCs forward. The shoulder straps should end up in the middle of their adjustment ranges. If you've had to pull them all the way, go for a smaller BC. If you've just barely been able to buckle them, try a larger size. Take a deep breath and adjust the chest strap so it's snug, but not tight, and the shoulder straps neither slide

off your shoulders nor crowd your neck.

Inflate the BC and see how it feels now. Too much chest squeeze? See how much you have to loosen the chest and shoulder straps in order to relieve it, but don't go too loose. Remember your BC will be deflated during most of your dive.

Deflate it again and wiggle your hips, twist left and right, and walk around the store a little. Does the tank move with you? Is the BC comfortable on your shoulders? Your back and hips? If it feels close to correct but not spot-on, it may have more adjustments. Many BCs, especially the more expensive ones, have adjustable lumbar supports, kidney pads, etc. Certain brands and models have unique adjustments like torso length (between shoulder strap and cummerbund); this is another area where salespeople earn their pay, as some of these

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adjustments are not obvious.

How tightly a BC should fit is partly a matter of preference, though it should never be so loose that it's going west when you're going south. Typically, back-inflation BCs can be sized to a tighter fit; a jacket style may need more room for bladder inflation.

Masks: Seal the Deal

IT'S NATURAL TO FOCUS on how wide the field of view is or on how comfortable it feels against your face. But the first consideration ought to be whether or not it seals well against your face. Believe me, you won't like a wide-view, comfortable but leaky mask.

Despite claims, no one mask fits all. Some of us with round, soft, wrinkle-free faces can wear almost any mask. Others

who look more like, say, Lyle Lovett, may not get a perfect seal with any mask. You really do need to try them on, maybe lots of them, before you buy. (Divers with small or narrow faces should look at children's masks. They're available with the same quality as adult masks, but the skirt is about an inch narrower.)

Shop for a mask with the idea that you will try on every single mask in the store, no matter how ugly it is, until you find the best fit.

Take your regulator with you because it distorts your face and affects the mask seal. And take your thickest dive gloves. Then do the following with every mask you try:

First: Fold the strap in front of the lens. The strap does not make the seal and can even prevent a seal by distorting the skirt if it's pulled too tight. Now put your reg in your mouth, put the mask

against your face and look up at the ceiling. The skirt should touch your skin evenly all around its perimeter. Try jiggling it a little to find its best position; most faces are not symmetrical. Make sure no hair is under the skirt.

Second: Try taking a small breath through your nose and looking straight ahead. If the mask fits, it will stay glued to your face, at least for a few seconds. Of course, its weight is trying to peel it off your face and will probably succeed, but the longer it stays, the better it fits. Don't suck too hard at the mask, though. That will make poor-fitting masks seal too. You're looking for masks that will seal with a gentle inhalation.

Third: Try it again with the strap on, but don't pull the strap too tight. Suck the mask into your face a little and hold your breath. Does it stay there or slowly

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lose the seal?

Fourth: Here's why you brought gloves. Wearing them, make sure you can pinch your nose (to equalize your ears). Some masks have too little space between nose pocket and lens frame for fat fingers in thick gloves.

If you're lucky, you will have found several masks that seal pretty well. Discard those that don't feel comfortable against your face—that push up against your nose or cut into your forehead, for example. Slight discomfort becomes real pain after an hour or so of diving. From the masks still standing, choose one that offers the features or look you want.

Fins: Pockets of Comfort

A FIN POCKET NEEDS to fit your boot (or your foot in the case of full-foots)

tightly, but not too tight. If it's loose, it's less efficient because it wiggles on your foot, wasting thrust. If it's too tight, it will hurt your foot by the end of the dive. And sometimes, especially with big dry suit boots, it can be pretty tough just to pull

the thing off your foot.

The blade should be sized to your strength and size too. Smaller, weaker divers might do better with smaller fin blades if they have the choice. **SD**

AND FOR THE LADIES

AS YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED, women differ from most men both in size and shape. That creates two fit problems. One source for a smaller size is gear made for children. Masks, gloves, booties, exposure suits and even BCs are made for children today with adult quality.

A woman's shape often dictates a different design to get a good fit, and breasts are only part of it. Women typically have shorter torsos, wider hips and longer legs in proportion to their height than men do. As a result, many companies now market wetsuits, BCs and other gear specifically for women's shapes. The women's model doesn't fit all women better than a comparably sized unisex model, but it's worth trying both.

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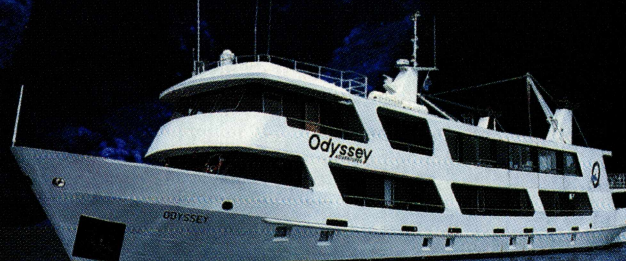
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to dive,” says Stuart Miller, M.D., medical director of the department of hyperbaric medicine at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco. “But you do need to be in good general health and be somewhat physically fit. Plenty of people can dive safely when the water’s calm and clear. But conditions can change and become strenuous quickly. That’s when divers with existing health conditions can get into trouble. It’s great that we’re finding ways for more people to dive; it’s just important that we’re smart about it.”

Being smart means keeping up on the latest medical guidelines for diving. “Also, you need to work with your doctor, who should be well-versed in scuba, to determine your risk,” says frequent diver and Wichita Falls, Texas, pathologist Yvonne Hearn, M.D. To help, we’ve rounded up the latest advice on eight common conditions that keep would-be divers on the beach. Remember, these are just guidelines and aren’t meant to be a substitute for a consultation with a medical professional.

Asthma

BEFORE THE RESTRICTIONS were loosened in 1995, an asthma diagnosis meant no diving—period. People with asthma can develop intermittent episodes of coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath. Exposure to noxious fumes, cold air, exercise, stress or other allergens can trigger an attack. And an asthma attack causes bronchial constriction and an accumulation of mucus in the airways. That spells bad news on ascent, because you may not be able to exhale fully, raising your risk for pulmonary barotrauma and gas embolism.

The bottom line: “Someone with well-controlled asthma with well-known environmental triggers can be cleared to dive if they are evaluated by a physician familiar with diving medicine and pass a pulmonary function screening,” says Dr.

Miller. If you're on asthma medications, you'll need to demonstrate normal pulmonary function at rest and again after vigorous exercise. "If your asthma is acting up, such that you need to use your inhaler up to 24 to 48 hours before your dive, you shouldn't be diving that day," cautions Dr. Miller.

Diabetes

LIKE ASTHMA, diabetes used to be an absolute no-dive disease. Long term, diabetes can cause organ and circulatory problems that can inhibit your ability to see and feel, and it increases your risk for serious heart troubles. More immediately, people with insulin-dependent dia-

betes are at risk for hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which can cause impaired judgment, lack of physical coordination or a sudden loss of consciousness—an extremely dangerous possibility for the diver and his buddy.

The bottom line: Today, it's still a rough road to the dive boat for most people with diabetes, but if you pass certain criteria, you can be cleared to take the (careful and limited) plunge. "If you're a well-controlled diabetic with no other complications, it's possible to dive conservatively, and with a doctor's clearance," says Dr. Miller. "There are well-designed protocols that you must follow. These guidelines, provided by a physician familiar with the issues of diving with diabetes, coupled with a careful medical examination can be used to clear some diabetics to dive," adds Dr. Miller.

It's still a rough road to the dive boat for most people with diabetes, but if you pass certain criteria, you can be cleared to take the plunge.

Heart Attack

NO HARD AND FAST RULES for this one. Some dive operators will black-ball anyone with a history of heart attack; others will let them slide. The obvious risk is the possibility that you'll have another one in the water.

The bottom line: "If you have chest pain or have any other symptoms of heart disease like light-headedness or breathlessness during exertion, you absolutely can't dive," says Dr. Hearn. Otherwise, DAN recommends you wait six to 12 months, are completely symptom-free and pass an exercise stress test before you go back to diving after a heart attack.

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DCS

RECOVERING FROM decompression sickness is a bit like coming back from a car accident. Was it a fender bender? Or did you have a full-on Malachi crunch? How soon you can hit the road again depends on the nature of the accident, the extent of the injury and the time it takes for a full recovery.

The bottom line: It depends upon the specific symptoms you experienced and how long it took you to get over them. "If you had a 'deserved hit'—that is you pushed the no-decompression limits—and you have been treated with one-time hyperbaric therapy and have complete resolution of symptoms, you should be able to dive again after at least 30 days off," says Dr. Miller. "If you required multiple treatments to resolve your symptoms, you should take at least 90 days off. If you had a significant neurological injury, you should not return to diving. In all cases, you should have a medical evaluation to be sure you have no underlying predisposition for DCS," he says. If you got an "undeserved hit"—that is, you followed all the rules and you still got DCS, you should not return to diving until you undergo evaluation to determine the underlying cause.

Surgery

ANY SURGERY, from rotator cuff repair to hip replacement, can limit your ability to meet the physical demands of scuba and theoretically increases your risk for DCS because scar tissue impedes circulation and makes off-gassing more difficult. As with heart disease, dive operators can reserve the right to decline you.

The bottom line: "You need full release from your surgeon," says Dr. Hearn. "You should have no pain, swelling, stiffness or mobility problems." Once you've been cleared by your doctor, respect your increased DCS risk and dive a little more conservatively, staying well within your limits.

Migraines

MIGRAINES ARE PERIODIC, throbbing, sometimes debilitating headaches that generally are brought on by known triggers, such as cold temperatures, certain foods, smells, stresses or physical exertion. Migraine headache symptoms also can include nausea, vomiting and

extreme sensitivity to light and sound.

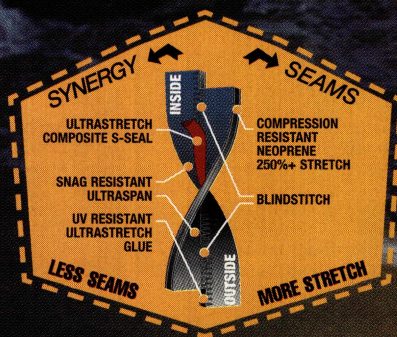
The bottom line: "Scuba presents many potential migraine triggers, from being immersed in water to exertion to the cooling effect of the water. So if you have a history of incapacitating migraines, don't dive," warns Dr. Hearn. Otherwise, you are probably safe to dive,

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so long as the medications you take for migraines do not cause you to be drowsy.

Depression

MOOD STATES THAT involve feelings of hopelessness do not mix well with diving. "There are a number of fatalities on record that DAN believes were suicides," says Dr. Hearn. "Not that people got on the boat with the intention of killing themselves, but once they submerged, the idea took hold." Depression medications act on your central nervous system and can predispose you to nitrogen narcosis. These medications also can make you sleepy or agitated.

The bottom line: If you have a history of suicidal thoughts, you should not dive, says Dr. Hearn. "Otherwise, you need to be evaluated. Ideally, your depression should be in remission." If you

control your depression with medications, first clear diving with your doctor. Then avoid diving during the first few weeks on an antidepressant when effects on mental alertness are most significant.

If you suffer from a chronically clogged head, prescription nasal sprays work wonders and don't put you at risk for drowsiness.

Allergies

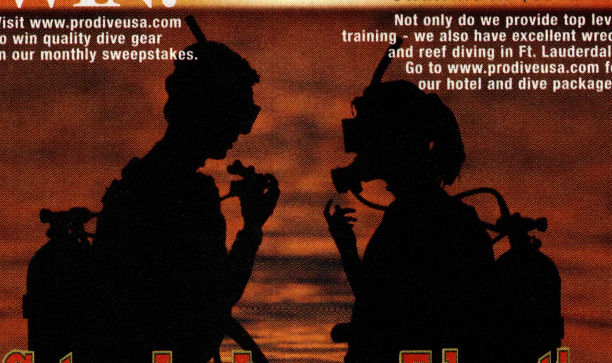
NASAL AND SINUS congestion brought on by allergies can deep-six a dive faster than a hurricane because it makes it impossible to equalize the pressure in your ears. And if you can't clear

your ears, you can't dive.

The bottom line: Sudafed decongestant is the drug du jour of sniffling divers, but don't just pop these pills without some caution, warns Dr. Hearn. "It can accelerate your heart rate and make you anxious, and it shouldn't be used by people with high blood pressure." Afrin 12 Hour nasal spray is a better choice for short trips. Also, newer-generation antihistamines like Claritin are a better choice for diving with allergies. If you suffer from a chronically clogged head, prescription nasal sprays like Flonase work wonders and don't put you at risk for drowsiness, rebound congestion or reverse block, as do many shorter-acting over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants. Just be aware that you need to use Flonase well in advance of your trip for it to be effective. **SD**

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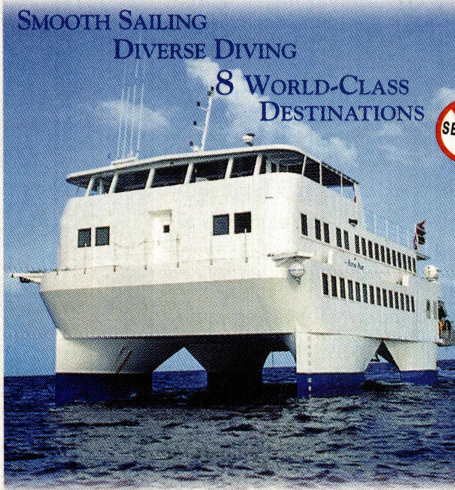
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DIVING AFTER BONE FRACTURES

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A: Of course, you shouldn't dive with an acute fracture that hasn't fully healed. Because pain can limit the use of your fractured limb, it can impede your ability to dive safely. Also, swelling and changes in blood flow could impair the efficient release of nitrogen stored in the injured tissues, possibly increasing your risk of DCI. And symptoms caused by the injury, such as

pain and numbness, burning, itching or tingling can add confusion to a diagnosis if DCI is being investigated.

However, after your fracture has healed, you've completed rehabilitation and gotten approval by an orthopedic surgeon, you can resume diving. There is little or no evidence to suggest you're at higher risk of DCI once you've healed completely.

If you experience persistent pain, numbness or weakness, a dive physician should evaluate your condition before you resume diving. If you return to diving, an orthopedic surgeon must carefully document your neurological, vascular and functional deficits. This documentation may prove useful for comparison by a physician who is trying to rule out possible decompression illness following a dive or series of dives.

In many patients with chronic pain, no further injury occurs through increased activity. In fact, many studies report that subjects show improvement of overall function and a reduction in chronic pain.

DAN Dive Safety and Medical Information Line, (919) 684-2948; **DAN 24-Hour Diving Emergency Hotline**, (919) 684-4DAN (collect); or (919) 684-8111; **web**: www.DiversAlertNetwork.org.

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The Art and Science of the Over/Under

To combine topside and underwater scenes in a single image, you've got to understand a little physics. **TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN FRINK**

THE BISECTED frame of the "over/under" photo, capturing topside and underwater elements in a single shot, is one of the most striking formats available to underwater photographers. While the results can be dramatic, the execution is tricky. To create your own over/under, also known as the "split" or "50/50," you'll want a housed camera with a wide-angle lens and dome port as well as a good understanding of what happens when you use that dome port simultaneously in air and water.

Over/under photos are plagued by complications in both exposure and focus. Focus is complicated by the fact that the above-water portion of the photo is essentially unaffected

by the dome port, while the underwater portion is significantly affected. In terms of exposure, the topside portion of the shot is invariably brighter than the underwater half. Here's a quick lesson in over/under physics.

Focus Factors

THE DOME PORT offers no special optical properties above water, functioning essentially as a clear window. This means that a subject above water, 10 feet away, will be in sharp focus when the lens's distance scale is set to 10 feet. Lenses are calibrated to work in air, unless they are amphibious water-contact lenses like the Nikonos 15mm or 13mm (for the RS), in which case they don't work well above water at all. In a housing, the topside portion will have air in front of the lens and air in front of the port, so there is no differential medium.

For the portion of the dome port that's in the water, however, the rules change. Because the underwater portion has air in front of the lens, but water in front of the port, the dome port acts essentially as another lens element. A "virtual image" of that portion of the photo is created inches in front of the lens.

The point of focus for the virtual image is dependent on the size of the dome. In ball-park terms, the virtual image exists at twice the diameter of the dome away from the lens. For a six-inch dome, the virtual image is about 12 inches away, and for a nine-inch dome, the focus point can be assumed to be 18 inches away.

Of course this means that a lens that can't focus as near as the virtual image won't be able to focus at all. Some wide-to-telephoto zoom lenses may have a minimum focus of



nearly two feet, so to use them behind a six-inch dome requires the use of a supplementary close-up lens known as a diopter. This will change the range of focus, accentuating the near focus capability and therefore allowing focus on the virtual image.

Exposure Factors

BECAUSE WATER IS substantially more dense than air, light is absorbed as a function of depth, time of day, water clarity and surface conditions. There may be as little as a half-stop difference between the topside and underwater portions of the photo if you're working in very shallow water with a white sand bottom, or the difference can be two or more stops if you're working in open water without the benefit of light reflected off the bottom. Particularly early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when the light rays strike the water surface at an oblique angle, there can be a significant exposure difference between the topside and underwater portions of the image.

With a fisheye lens, the over/under doesn't need to be exactly symmetrical.





A white sand bottom can help reduce the exposure difference between the topside and underwater portions of the image.

The Optical Solution

ONCE UPON A TIME a photographer could buy a special filter designed for over/unders called a "split diopter," but I'm not aware of a commercial source for these today. You may have to employ the services of an optician to create a split diopter to your specifications. This filter uses neutral-density glass on the top (to hold back the sunlight and make it more closely approximate the light striking the underwater scene) and a diopter (usually a +3 or +4) to balance the focus. We know that with the wide-angle lens focused on the virtual image for the underwater portion of the frame (say 16 inches for an eight-inch dome), anything more than about two feet distant in the topside half will be out of focus.

The answer is to focus the lens nearly on wherever the topside subject is likely to be (usually infinity) and use the strength of the magnifying lens on the bottom half to pull focus back to the distance required by the virtual image. The choice of diopter strength

for the bottom will depend on the size of the dome (as that controls where the virtual image will occur) and the likely distance of the primary topside subject from the lens.

UPSIDE: The split diopter is the best solution to match both light and refraction. Under perfect conditions such as slick calm seas, this is the ideal option.

DOWNSIDE: The filter cannot be rotated under water, so the photographer must choose whether to shoot all verticals or all horizontals in each session. Also, because of the way most split diopters are ground and glued into the filter ring, the split between topside and under water must be exactly symmetrical. The intersection of the two pieces of glass will show unless the composition places the surface of the water at that precise point.

The Practical Solution

A MORE FORGIVING MEANS to shoot over/unders is with a full-frame fisheye lens (16mm Nikkor or 15mm Canon). Recently, I

have had good luck using the Nikon 12-24mm zoom on my digital SLR cameras as well. The depth of field with these wide lenses is fantastic, enough so that with an aperture of f-8 or smaller it is possible to hold focus on both the topside and underwater scene. I usually focus on the foreground part of the scene, which tends to be the underwater section, and let the background go a little soft if necessary.

UPSIDE: The photographer has the choice of vertical or horizontal compositions because the water/air interface can be anywhere in the frame. Also, this optic is more forgiving of surface chop as there is no fixed intersection of diopter and neutral density to contend with.

DOWNSIDE: The downsides include the extreme distortion typical of fisheyes, and the lack of exposure correction. If you're shooting a shallow reef with lots of reflecting sand, the f-stop difference may be very slight. In this case, you should expose for the highlights (topside) and let the underwater portion record slightly dark. Local controls in Photoshop can bring up the levels in the underwater scene.

Other Variables:

> **STROBE FILL:** Another way to match the exposure to the topside section is to use strobe fill to augment the underwater portion. This also gives the benefit of adding color and illuminating the mask when photographing divers.

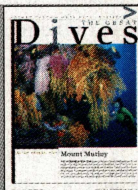
> **DOMESIZE:** Large-diameter domes tend to spread the water over the surface area more evenly, thereby diminishing the effects of surface chop. In bumpy seas a wider dome is much easier to use.

> **DOMEMATERIAL:** Water sheets off glass more quickly and completely than off Plexiglas. This makes glass ports better for shooting over/unders.

> **WETTING AGENTS:** Whether you're using a glass or Plexiglas dome, a wetting agent like Rain-X will facilitate the sheeting action of water and minimize unwanted water drops. **SD**

LE Depth

1



GREAT DIVES: MOUNT MUTINY, BLIGH WATERS, FIJI, P. 17 •

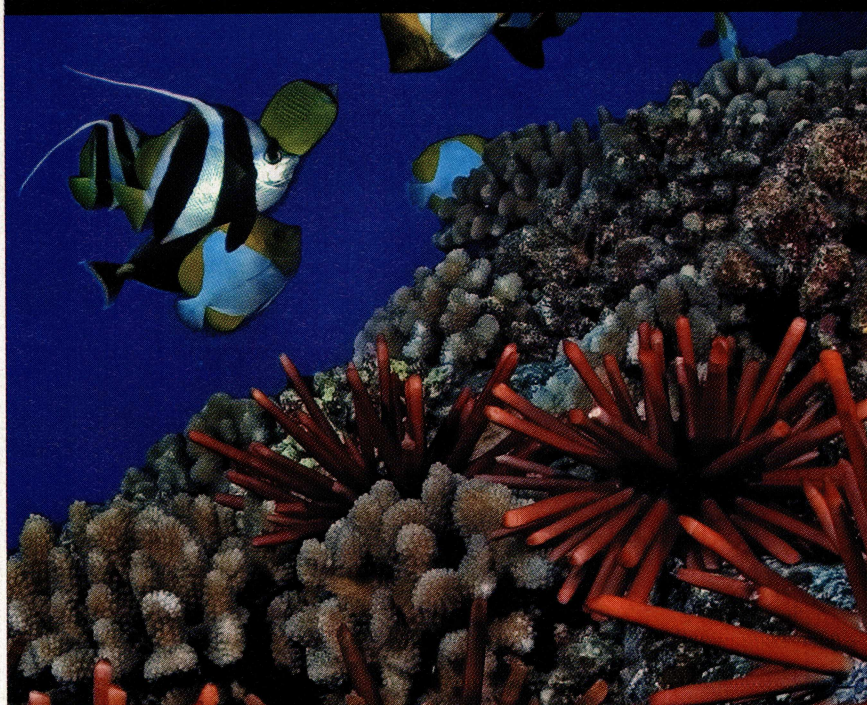
Divers usually visit Mount Mutiny by live-aboard, but you can reach it from Viti Levu or Vanua Levu with a fast boat. For a list of dive operators and live-aboards in Fiji, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder.

GREAT DIVES: NAVY PIER, EXMOUTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, P. 18 •

The Navy Pier is a military facility that limits the number of divers and sometimes is closed, so you must coordinate with a local dive shop in Exmouth to make this dive or make arrangements with your tour operator. For a list of dive operators and live-aboards in Australia, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder.

GREAT DIVES: THE ANCHOR, TURKS & CAICOS, P. 20 •

Live-aboards and land-based operators both access this site. For a comprehensive list of dive charters and live-aboards in the Turks & Caicos, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder.



2



DIVE LOG: HAWAII, P. 64 • WATER

CONDITIONS: Average water temps range from the mid- to high 70s in March to the low to mid-80s in August. Of course, visibility varies from island to island, but it's usually quite excellent; often more than 100 feet. There's no bad time of year to visit Hawaii. However, swells from Alaska in winter make diving the state's northern sites practically impossible. Bring at least a 3mm suit in winter if you're prone to cold. **WEATHER:** It's sunny and warm, though it can rain a lot. There's very little annual variation in climate, and the average high is 85 degrees while the typical low is 70 degrees. **DOCUMENTS:** It's a U.S. state, so U.S. divers need no documents for entry. Canadians need some form of personal identification, and all other foreign visitors need a passport and possibly a visa. **DIVE OPERATORS:** For a list of dive operators in Hawaii, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder. **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Check out the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau web site at www.GoHawaii.com.

DAVID FLEETHAM

3



DRIVE & DIVE: SAN CARLOS, MEXICO, P. 41

DRIVING DIRECTIONS > Tucson, Ariz., offers the most direct route to San Carlos from the U.S. Take I-19 south from Tucson to Nogales, Ariz. Get off at exit 4, the truck route south to the border via Mariposa Road, which merges into Route 15. Fill up with gas, get Mexican insurance at one of the insurance offices near the border and be sure to have change, either in dollars or pesos, for the toll road to San Carlos. Cross the border and proceed south on Route 15 to the checkpoint, about 15 miles. Pick up a tourist card at the immigration office, which requires a passport or birth certificate and photo ID. Take the tourist card, your driver's license, and vehicle registration to the nice folks at the copy window and get copies made. Take the copies to the "Only Sonora" window and get a temporary import permit with a sticker to place on your windshield. All this paperwork usually takes less than an hour. Proceed to the customs area. Once you've cleared customs, continue south on the toll road.

Drive to Hermosillo, about 175 miles south of the border, and follow the signs to Guaymas. Continue south and take the San Carlos turnoff to the right, about 250 miles from the border.

The town is another three or four miles down the brick street, which is Sonora Highway 124 or Boulevard Beltrones. San Carlos is the point of departure for dive boats going to San Pedro Island and the *Presidente Diaz Ordaz*.

LALO AND FRENCHIE'S COVES > Go through San Carlos on Sonora Highway 124, past the marina. Take the turnoff to the Punta San Antonio overlook. Just before the steel gate, turn left on the dirt road toward the beach. Follow the dirt road to both Lalo and Frenchie's coves.

4



Travel Guide: Belize, p. 34

Water Conditions > Mid-70s in winter and low to mid-80s in summer. Wear at least a Lycra skin to ward off coral abrasions. Off Ambergris Caye, water clarity is variable, though generally decent. The visibility off the atolls is rarely bad, but it's best from April to June. Vis off southern Belize peaks in spring, but northerly winds can lower vis and bring rougher seas November through January. The water is always clearest outside the barrier reef. **Weather** > Tropical, which means pretty warm year-round. The coast, cayes and atolls enjoy a brisk prevailing wind from the Caribbean, which moderates the heat. **Documents** > Passport and proof of return is required. **Money Matters** > The Belize dollar (BZ\$) trades at BZ\$2 to US\$1. Credit cards and traveler's checks are accepted throughout the country. There is a \$35 departure tax. **Time** > The same as Central Standard Time in the U.S. Daylight saving time is not observed. **Electricity** > The same as in the U.S. and Canada—110 volts, 60 cycles—and the country uses the North American-style two-pin plug. **For More Information** > Visit the web site of the Belize Tourism Board at www.travelbelize.org. **Dive Operators** > For detailed information on Belize dive operators, comprehensive travel guides, special dive deals and recent trip reports submitted by users, click on TripFinder at the top of our home page, www.scubadiving.com.

EAGLE ROCK > From San Carlos, follow Sonora Highway 124 around the marina. Where the highway makes a sharp turn away from the water, continue on the local street along the bay. The street ends on a neck of land connecting the Punto Doble peninsula with the mainland. Drive to the seaside and park. The dive site is about halfway between the parking spot and the end of the peninsula.

KINO BAY > Follow Route 15 into Hermosillo to the intersection with Route 16.

Turn west on Route 16 and drive approximately 70 miles to Kino Bay. The highway splits at Kino. Take a right and go north toward the headland at the end of the bay. **DIVE SHOPS** > **El Mar Diving Center, San Carlos**, 011-52-622-226-0404, web: elmar.com/mexico. **Gary's Dive Shop, San Carlos**, 011-52-622-226-0049, web: www.garysdiveshop.com. **Ocean Sports, Marina San Carlos**, 011-52-622-226-0696, web: www.desertdivers.com.



COMPUTER REVIEW, P. 70

FEATURES	MANUFACTURER, PRODUCT NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION										
	AERIS Atmos Elite www.diveaeris.com	CITIZEN Aqualand Nx www.citizenwatch.com	DACOR Darwin Air www.divedacor.com	GENESIS React Pro www.genesisduba.com	GENESIS Resource Pro www.genesisduba.com	MARES M1 RGBM www.mares.com	OCEANIC VT Pro www.oceanicv.com	OCEANIC Veo 230 www.oceanicv.com	SHERWOOD Profile www.sherwoodscuba.com	SUUNTO Gekko www.suunto.com	TUSA IQ-700 Hunter www.tusa.com
PRICE	\$899.95	\$850	\$699	\$400 (wrist)	\$325 (wrist)	\$359	\$899.95	\$369.95 (module)	\$320-325 (wrist)	\$379	\$450
MADE IN	USA	Japan	Italy	USA	USA	Italy	USA	USA	USA	Finland	Japan
WARRANTY	2-yr. limited	5 yrs.	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2-yr. limited	2 yrs.	2-yr. limited
ALGORITHM (TISSUE COMPARTMENTS)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	DCIEM (4 TCs)	RGBM Mares-Wienke (10 TCs)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	RGBM Mares-Wienke (10 TCs)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	Modified Haldanean (12 TCs)	Suunto RGBM (9 TCs)	Modified Buhlmann by Bohrer (12 TCs)
AIR-INTEGRATED	Yes (hoseless)	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes (hoseless)	No	No	No	No
BATTERY	3V lithium user-replaceable	Rechargeable energy cell	2 AAA user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	2 AAA user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable	3V lithium user-replaceable
NITROX PERCENTAGE	21-50	21-50	21-50	21-50	N/A	21-50	21-50	21-50	N/A	21-50	21-99
PC INTERFACE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
DIVE PLAN/SIMULATOR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
GRAPHIC DISPLAYS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
COLOR HIGHLIGHT	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PROMPT CARD	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
MOUNTING OPTIONS	Wrist, retractor	Wrist	Console	Console, hose, wrist	Console, hose, wrist	Wrist	Wrist, transit clip	Wrist, console, hose, retractor	Console, hose, wrist	Wrist, console, hose, retractor	Wrist, console
ACTIVATION	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button	Water or push-button
USER CONTROL	2 buttons	4 buttons	2 buttons	2 buttons	1 button	2 buttons	2 buttons	2 buttons	1 button	3 buttons	3 buttons
PROGRAMMABLE SAFETY LEVELS	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
LOGGED DIVES	24	15	50 or 25 hrs.	50	50	50 or 38 hrs.	24	24	50	50	60
ALARMS	Audible and visual	Audible and visual	Audible and visual	Audible and visual	Visual	Audible and visual	Audible and visual	Audible and visual	Visual	Audible and visual	Audible and visual
VIOLATION LOCKOUT	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	24 hrs.	48 hrs.	48 hrs.
GAUGE MODE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
VARIABLE ASCENT RATE	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TIME TO FLY	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Countdown	Calculated	Calculated
MAX. DECO STOP CEILING	60 ft.	NA*	80 ft.	60 ft.	60 ft.	80 ft.	60 ft.	60 ft.	60 ft.	NA*	NA*
MAX. DEPTH IN DIVE MODE	330 ft.	266 ft.	450 ft.	330 ft.	330 ft.	450 ft.	330 ft.	330 ft.	330 ft.	328 ft.	328 ft.
ILLUMINATION	3 or 7 secs.	1 or 5 secs.	15 secs. or always on	10 secs.	10 secs.	15 secs. or always on	3 or 7 secs.	3 or 7 secs.	10 secs.	Phosphorescent display	4 to 5 secs.
TEMPERATURE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DATE/TIME	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Time only	Yes	Yes
MAX. ALTITUDE/SETTING	14,000 ft. auto	10,000 ft. auto	12,239 ft. manual	14,000 ft. auto	14,000 ft. auto	12,100 ft. manual	14,000 ft. auto	14,000 ft. auto	14,000 ft. auto	10,000 ft. manual	19,680 ft. manual

* Info was either unavailable or could not be confirmed by manufacturers as of press time.

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Maybe marriages are made in heaven, but the union between Playa Miguel Beach Houses and CoCo View Resort was definitely made underwater. And the love affair was no accident. All seven of the two- and three-bedroom homes are owned by CoCo Nuts, which is a group of frequent resort returnees. All the houses are oceanfront, with one-acre landscaped yards and a deepwater canal in the back. All have large screened porches and full kitchens. Some have air-conditioned bedrooms, sun decks or a second floor deck for stunning sunset views. Each house is roomy, breezy, spotlessly clean, expertly managed, and just a short walk down the beach from the resort. House broadband Internet access, pre-provisioning, and meal plans are all available.

And, of course, CoCo View's world-class scuba diving is the icing on the "wedding" cake. Two boat trips with up to four boat dives a day (including drop-offs) are included in the optional dive package. Easy-entry shore diving is the best in the islands. Only at CoCo View Resort do you have 24-hour-a-day access to several different barrier reef walls and a sunken wreck. Like their buddies staying at CoCo View, Playa Miguel guests have gear lockers right on the dock and full use of all the dive and resort facilities—including the exercise room, beach kayaks, oceanfront hot tub, spa services, and activities and tours.

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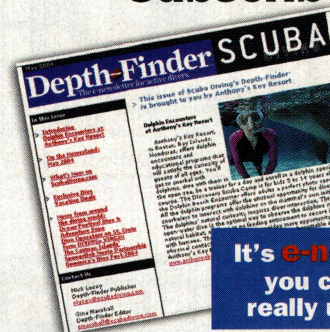
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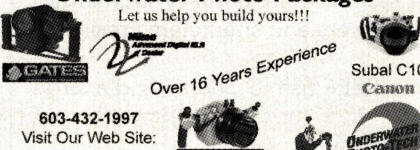
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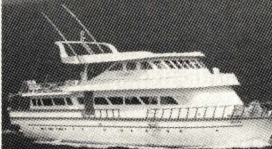
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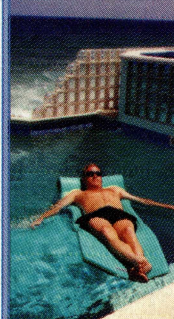
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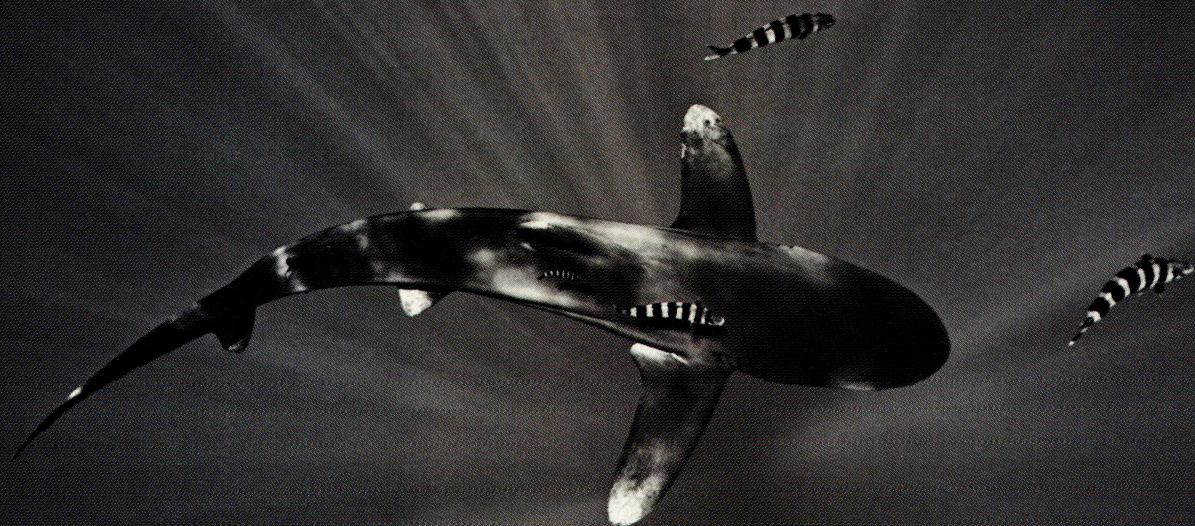
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